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THE

THE SPIDER'S WEB

FICTION

FUNERAL MARCH OF A MARIONETTE
WE OWE GOD A DEATH
THE SHEARS OF DESTINY
UNJUST JURY
COUNTERFEIT
HOUSEHOLD GODS
OUT OF THE NORTH
DEATH AND HIS SWEETHEART
MURDER OF MR. MALLABEE
ROOM FOR A GHOST
LONG FURROWS
CROOKEDSHAWS
SKIN FOR SKIN
STUBBLE
THE HOUR GLASS
MAGPIE'S HOARD
THESE ARE THEY . . .
FINALE
THE SOWN WIND
THE DARK HILL
BASTARD VERDICT
CONTINUING CITY
TALES OF HATE
THE WILD FLAME
THE HOUSE OF OGILVY

HISTORICAL NOVELS

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CRIMINOLOGY

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(*Notable British Trial Series*)
THE STROKE OF MURDER
SIX TRIALS
TRIAL OF FIELD AND GRAY
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THE SPIDER'S WEB



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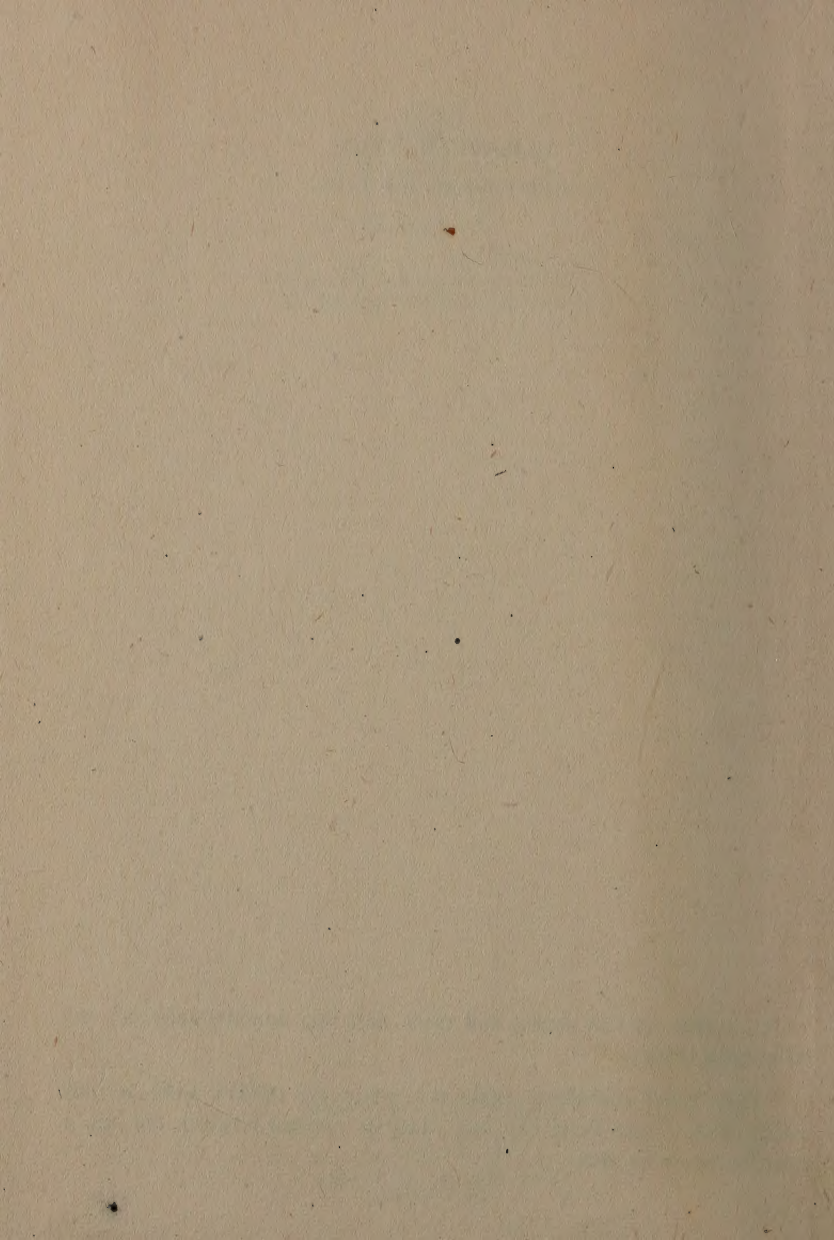
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FOR
ELISABETH KYLE
WHO GAVE ME THE TITLE

"... they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

"They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper."—ISAIAH lix, 4-5.



THE WINDOWS OF Miss Todd's bedroom overlooked the drive so that she could hear faintly the slow grinding of wheels on the prim gravel and a hum of lowered voices, all above the ordinary little sounds of a garden in summer. She lay in bed, not because she felt, or was, ill, but because it seemed the only way in which she could show respect for Fanny's wishes and Fanny's memory. Fanny, on the day of her funeral, would have wanted Miss Todd to stay in bed. Fanny would not have conceived it possible that she could have done anything except stay in bed. Fanny had always managed her, sheltered her, controlled her, and Miss Todd had gone on being managed, sheltered, and controlled by Fanny Anderson principally because it was less trouble than to assert herself once and for all.

Fanny Anderson was no relation of Miss Todd's. She was not a sister, a sister-in-law, a half-sister, or even a cousin, distant or otherwise. For thirty years she had been Miss Todd's handsomely paid companion and intimate friend, and her sudden, almost unexpected death had left the population of Little Batnors—the village where both old ladies lived—aghast, incredulous, and deeply pitying of poor Miss Todd. What would she do? Without her prop, adviser, and stay she would be lost, bewildered, uprooted, helpless. Fanny was so calm, so determined, so unswervingly right on every given occasion, so knowledgeable, so masterful in a ladylike fashion that Little Batnors could not at first believe that even Death would dare to stand up to her, much less conquer her. Apparently Death had accomplished both feats, as witnessed by that line of cars winding its way down Miss Todd's drive and out of the gate to turn towards the cemetery. It was not a large funeral. Fanny, as she so often repeated and emphasized, had no relatives, and during a sojourn of thirty years in the same house and the same place had made surprisingly few friends. Dr. Meredith, who had been called in directly she was laid low, Mr. Winchester, the rector, who was to conduct the burial service, and a sprinkling of neighbours and acquaintances whom Fanny, Miss Todd now realized, had deftly prevented from becoming anything more to Miss Todd than neighbours and acquaintances, had appeared, out of compassion for Miss Todd and respect for Fanny. Her coffin, its handsome massiveness a last token of the regard and esteem in which Miss Todd had held her irreplaceable Fanny, was in the hearse and—it wouldn't come back. The remainder of the procession—the other cars, the lawyer, the clergyman, the friends intimate enough with Miss Todd to show their sympathy by seeing Fanny laid to rest—would all return—but not Fanny. Fanny was dead and about to be buried.

Cremation? Miss Todd was old-fashioned. She disliked the thought. Besides, there was no crematorium very near. A funeral with a church service, a grave, and subsequently the erection of an expensive headstone, seemed much more in keeping with Fanny's personality, Fanny's prejudices, Fanny's pride. Fanny disapproved of cremation. Directly she was no longer in a situation to object it seemed distinctly unkind to go against her wishes. Fanny, Miss Todd felt certain, would have preferred to be buried.

Miss Todd shut her eyes as the cars moved noiselessly out of hearing

and opened them again when the soft click of the gate had heralded the exit of the last vehicle. How wise, how tactful, how understanding of Grier, her old lodge-keeper, to shut the gates, although it involved his hobbling out a second time to open them again when the funeral, shorn of Fanny's hearse, returned without her. Miss Todd felt very grateful to Grier. Nothing would have annoyed Fanny more than having the gates left open indefinitely merely, as she would have been certain to point out, in order to save Grier's legs. He wasn't, Fanny had certainly pointed out, paid to save his legs. Grier had realized, remembered, and respected Fanny's feelings in a very tactful manner. Miss Todd decided that the glow of gratitude which she felt towards Grier must immediately take a concrete and tangible form. Should it be a new suit or a present of money? Not money, perhaps. Fanny called monetary gifts to one's employees pauperizing the lower classes. She would disapprove of money, therefore a new suit—Miss Todd must consult her about that, suggest that she chose it (she would, in any case, but liked to be asked to undertake the trouble), and give it to Grier as Fanny's present as well as Miss Todd's.

With a slight sense of shock Miss Todd suddenly recalled that Fanny was dead and never again would choose Miss Todd's presents for her. The idea of choosing her own presents appalled Miss Todd. She never had, as long as she and Fanny had lived together. Fanny's was such good taste and, as she so sensibly pointed out, because Miss Todd possessed ample means was no excuse for wasting money. When Miss Todd proposed and was prepared to spend a guinea Fanny invariably reduced the sum to eight and sixpence. She pointed out (Fanny's gift for pointing out the obvious amounted to genius) that the happy recipient of the gift in question would not know that it had cost eight and sixpence instead of a guinea, and thus would have no occasion to feel aggrieved. Miss Todd used to acquiesce and agree and suggest that dearest Fanny must keep the change, and after a show of suitable demur dearest Fanny always did. It began to dawn on Miss Todd at the moment of dearest Fanny's funeral, again with a slight sense of shock, that dearest Fanny, in addition to scoring during arguments or domestic crises, had emerged therefrom not merely triumphant, superbly and indisputably right, but a gainer in a financial sense as well. There was Ann Cartaret, that nice girl at the rectory. (The Cartarets had succeeded the Warings, the rector and his wife who were in possession when Fanny came to Little Batnors.) Miss Todd had timidly proposed that Ann might come up one or two mornings a week to write Miss Todd's letters, thus saving not only Miss Todd's indifferent sight, but dearest Fanny's eyes. Fanny, with decision, rejected the arrangement and refused to have her eyes spared. Of course if Emily wanted her correspondence to become public property through the medium of the rectory Fanny would not point out further the inadvisability of the idea, but—Miss Todd capitulated instantly and Fanny, combining the post of amanuensis with her other labours, suggested that a secretarial remuneration, no ungenerous sum, should be added to her existing ample salary. Fanny, of course, never acknowledged the salary to be ample, but as she had fixed the figure herself she was, presumably, satisfied.

Only— Had Fanny ever been satisfied? It was shock number three when Miss Todd, glancing vaguely, haphazardly over thirty years of closest intimacy with Fanny, suddenly realized that so far from being satisfied

Fanny could only be temporarily appeased by instant and humble submission on the part of Miss Todd to everything that Fanny herself proposed. Even then it was usually the prelude to proposing something else, requiring further submission. Their intercourse—Miss Todd could not bear to bring herself to acknowledge it, even in her slightly confused thoughts—had been a succession of futile, weakening struggles on her side, and triumphant, aggressive domination on Fanny's. Miss Todd was appalled that she, at the very moment when Fanny was being buried, could think such unkind things. Fanny had meant so well. She had done so much, executively, untiringly, in order to spare Miss Todd. The latter refused—absolutely refused—out of an expiring sense of loyalty, founded on fear, subservience of the weak to the strong, submission to the creed of thirty years that Fanny could do no wrong, to recall those last days of their association. She might have been mistaken when she thought that Fanny—

Miss Todd turned over in bed and, burying her face in the pillow, wept weakly. Her weeping was as indeterminate as everything else about her. Elisabeth, the housemaid, attracted by the soft, semi-stifled, pitiful sounds, looked in, hesitated, and withdrew noiselessly. Poor old lady! She and Sarah, the cook, didn't dare to think what the mistress (purely a courtesy title, for Miss Todd, although the owner of the house, was a cipher. Miss Anderson had arranged everything) would do now. Elisabeth would catch it from Miss Anderson, when she came in, for disturbing Miss Todd.

With a shock, somewhat similar to the three shocks already experienced by Miss Todd, Elisabeth realized, as Miss Todd had done, that Miss Anderson would not be coming back. She had left the house half an hour before in circumstances the suitability of which would have soothed her inordinate vanity, the while they enraged her proud spirit, and she was not returning. Elisabeth could not take that in any more than Miss Todd had succeeded in taking it in.

For twenty minutes Miss Todd wept, in pathetic little sniffs and gulps. At the end of the time she raised her head and realized (shock number four) that she had been allowed to shed as many tears as she pleased without Fanny telling her to stop. She glanced apprehensively at the door. Directly Fanny came in she would detect that Miss Todd had been crying and would disapprove wholeheartedly. Miss Todd reminded herself that Fanny was not coming in, never would be, and lay back aghast at the enormous, mounting, unspeakable sensation of relief which the reminder afforded. Fanny was not coming in ever again because she could not come in when she was dead. Even if she wanted to come in, and Miss Todd wanted her to come in, she simply could not. She was dead several days, and by this time, presumably, in the process of being expensively and suitably buried.

By way of soothing her active conscience and paying a vague tribute to Fanny as she remembered her during thirty years of having been bullied, managed, and 'run' by her, Miss Todd's mind went falteringly, shrinkingly over the stages of her acquaintance with Fanny Anderson.

It had begun—that acquaintance—thirty years before. Miss Todd, a scared spinster of forty-eight, just released from years of attendance on an exacting invalid father and a lifelong domination by the same, was finding her belated freedom terrifying. She saw, sitting across the table from her, Mr. Massey, the family lawyer, now her trustee, an erect, clean-shaven,

urbane personality, and herself—Emily Todd—small, slight, prematurely wrinkled and faded (it was long before the days of unabashed make-up and Papa would have disapproved most strongly of such aids to nature), clad in sombre, expensive mourning, screwing up her eyes against the glare which seemed so brazen after the lowered blinds of the last four days. A holiday? She had repeated the word doubtfully, hesitatingly, disdainfully. Where should she go? She was not ill, or in need of rest or recuperation. Holidays—this had been Papa's creed—were only for those who had earned them.

"You have, Miss Emily," Mr. Massey told her bluntly.

"Oh, but——"

"The late Mr. Todd's illness has been a great strain. Yes, I know"—almost impatiently he brushed aside her feeble reminder that others, paid strangers, had shouldered the heaviest share of the burden—"you had nurses and good servants and all the rest of it, but a great deal fell on you, and your—er—bereavement coming after these trying months—— Really, my dear lady, you ought to go away."

Emily Todd's thoughts had swerved to her past, an exceedingly dull affair. She was an only child. As such she had been educated at home, and at the right time emerged into a circle of narrow, elderly, uninteresting people. Save that she put up her hair, wore long skirts, paid calls with Mamma, and did no lessons, she might as well have remained in the school-room. The Croft, her home, was a large house in large grounds, situated on the outskirts of a small village in the heart of the country. Her parents, themselves only children, had married late in life and by the time Emily grew up were ageing, fossilized, wrapped up in petty ailments and petty interests. The only young people were the two daughters at the rectory, both conscientiously devoted to good works, and the sons of Colonel Cheeseman of Ryle Mount. After these entered the Army they vanished from Little Batnors and Emily Todd's ken. Wilfrid Cheeseman—she always felt certain that it was Wilfrid—once sent her a valentine; otherwise no romance of however meagre a description haloed the drab horizon of her days. Meals, walks, church-going, needlework, of an expensive and useless kind—such had been her sole occupations and interests. Mamma died, and Emily dutifully continued Papa's companion. What Papa said, what Papa thought, what Papa wished or disliked or disapproved of or ordered—these became the fixed centres around which his daughter's world revolved. She had never spent a night away from him or from her home alone. Papa gave her an ample allowance for her dress and personal expenses. Otherwise she never handled a penny or knew anything about finance. She possessed no opinions of her own, was constitutionally incapable of forming any, or of asserting her authority and views. Papa discountenanced argumentative women. Miss Todd grew up imbued with the idea that it was ill-bred to differ openly from another person. In any case she never dared to differ from Fanny. Fanny was always right.

Papa had three strokes, and life for the last two years had consisted of trying to interpret his mangled, mumbling speech without angering him, overseeing the nurses who came and went in a dreary, familiar procession, consulting with Mrs. Crabbie, the housekeeper (how Fanny hated Mrs. Crabbie, and how helpless Miss Todd felt when Fanny finally uprooted the family prop!), and at last Papa's release, Papa's funeral, and the terri-

fying prospect of freedom stretching before her. Miss Todd did not want freedom. She would not know what to do with it. Anything so vulgar or so mundane as money-matters had never been discussed between the parents and their daughter, but Emily was always tacitly given to understand that she would be amply provided for. The terms of Papa's will, Mr. Massey's talk of investments, property, income-tax, death duties and so on had merely bewildered her. Once she gathered that she would not starve and could, if so minded, continue to live at Little Batnors in the style to which she had been accustomed, she did not seek to penetrate further through the labyrinth of her financial affairs. Mr. Massey had promised Papa that he would act as her legal adviser and man of business. Thus buttressed, Emily rested content. And now here was Mr. Massey taking advantage of his position as her trustee to moot this absurd, unnecessary, unwelcome suggestion of a holiday.

"But where?" she countered feebly.

"My dear Miss Emily"—Mr. Massey laughed and spread out his well-kept hands—"the whole world, one might say, is open to you."

"That's just it," lamented Miss Todd.

The whole world! Not merely England, but the world. Her brain reeled.

Mr. Massey proposed affably: "Why not go abroad?"

Abroad? The idea terrified her. "But I——"

"No difficulty about the language, I assure you. You could take your maid, and English is pretty universally spoken. When I went for a tour of Brittany last summer——"

Mr. Massey was launched on a tide of continental reminiscences.

Determinedly Miss Todd clung to the one spar in this awful sea which seemed to be engulfing her, washing her away. She would not go abroad. How appalling to fall ill in a strange town, a strange country, a strange hotel, and perhaps die surrounded by strange faces and be buried in alien soil! Stammeringly she laid these facts before Mr. Massey who seemed somewhat amused.

"There's no reason why you should be taken ill on your travels, you know. Ordinary precautions about drinking water, a tin of—er—Keating's Powder"—he reddened and coughed apologetically—"and you needn't anticipate anything so dire."

"I—I'd rather not risk it," faltered Miss Todd.

"Well, what about some part of your own country? Beauty spots everywhere. Devon, Cornwall, the Lakes, Wales, or the cathedral towns, the south coast, Worthing or Brighton." He talked on mellifluously.

Miss Todd grasped at another spar. The cathedral towns. Her mind conjured up a picture of grey, ivy-hung walls crumbling in the mellow sunshine, a vast tower against a blue sky, church dignitaries pacing a velvet sward, deep-toned bells ringing out through the soft air, and a chaste circle of bishops, deans, and their attendant female belongings. (Dear Papa had been a great admirer of Trollope's novels.) Little Batnors was set in flat, featureless, agricultural country, with a damp soil and much east wind. She thought of a county of orchards and fruit blossom and a warm breeze from the west. Could Mr. Massey recommend a cathedral town and somewhere to stay?

Mr. Massey, charmed to find his client so reasonable, suggested Derriford.

Miss Todd hunted out an ancient atlas and they pored over it together. The lawyer put on his pince-nez. Emily utilized poor Papa's magnifying-glass. Yes; Derriford seemed within a reasonable distance. She had never been any great way in a train and Papa had set his face against motors. Dimly it occurred to Miss Todd that she could now buy a car, but Smithson, the old groom who managed the pony and trap, was far too elderly to master the intricacies and responsibilities of such a thing. Besides, as dearest Papa used to say, what were one's legs for if not to walk? No; she would travel by train to Derriford, and—her mind envisaged a loop-hole of escape—if she did not like it there was nothing to prevent her coming back.

"Is there an hotel?" she inquired timidly.

"Several, I believe. The Green Dragon is the best. The assizes are held at Derriford, you know, and the judges require suitable accommodation."

"Oh, yes."

"Why not write to the proprietor and ask about terms and so forth? Or shall I do it for you?"

"Could you? That would be very kind."

Derriford! She never recalled the name, the place, without a shudder of repulsion. At Derriford she had first met Fanny.

(They must be nearly at the church by this. Fanny's coffin was probably being carried in, the bearers carefully negotiating that awkward step at the dark corner just inside the door. Miss Todd had always cherished a nervous dislike of that step ever since Papa had stumbled down it one Sunday and only just avoided a bad fall. Fanny always hustled me, Miss Todd reflected angrily. She knew that with my poor sight I was afraid of tripping, but she didn't care. She had wonderful sight herself. . . .

Fanny's going to the cemetery. She won't come back. She'll never be in this house again. Never. Never. . . .

Miss Todd clawed the eiderdown higher. Odd to feel cold in bed on a summer day. Fanny would tell her that she didn't take enough exercise. Every morning, rain or shine, she marched Miss Todd out for a walk to restore circulation. There were only two walks at Little Batnors. One was the main road, along which Fanny's hearse would presently be bowling, a dull thoroughfare with flat fields on either hand, and the other was towards the wood, uphill and damp. Fanny always chose which they should take. To-day she had no choice. Without her consent, not of her own volition, she must go along the high road for the last time. . . .

In future, unless she wished, Miss Todd need not go out. She saw a vista of life without Fanny, life without Fanny's supervision, blunt bullying, espionage, or fault-finding. She was free—at seventy-eight.

Derriford. Behind Miss Todd's shut eyelids there rose a picture of it as she saw it first. The countryside had been a mass of blossom—apple and pear—and in the town itself were quaint black-and-white timbered houses, narrow, twisting streets, old-fashioned shops, the river, the cathedral. The Green Dragon was in a street near the cathedral close.

Although buttressed by her maid Timmins, Miss Todd did not like the Green Dragon. It was too up-to-date, too sophisticated, too near the traffic thundering through the main part of the town. She was terrified of the waiter who attended to her particular table and the over-officious,

bustling chambermaid. After a lifetime of having had her mind made up for her Miss Todd yearned for freedom in certain particulars. The waiter decided what dishes she ought to like, almost, his manner implied, which would be good for her. The chambermaid was disagreeable about filling Miss Todd's hot-water bottle, her sniff intimating that she should not require any such thing. Miss Todd meditated fleeing from the Green Dragon, but was instantly confronted with the problem of where to go. She could not creep home, shamefaced, after a bare week's absence. Any other hotel, in any other town, would probably be equally uncongenial. She walked about the neighbourhood—there was little else to do—and one afternoon she discovered the Woolpack Inn.

Beyond the town were roads fringed with houses, each set in its own garden, but once these had been left behind sheer country rose on all sides. There were fields, ripening, fat, luscious, and turns and lanes leading to delicious, unexpected things. Once it was a storybook village with green, duck-pond, and pump. Another time Miss Todd chanced on two rows of crumbling thatched cottages and a boggy little track that ran away towards a wood. The wood fascinated her, but Timmins, who always accompanied her on these explorations, dissuaded her from entering it by muttered warnings of gipsies and tramps. Instead, the two toiled up a long road which, at the crest, split sharply into two roads, one going downhill. Miss Todd wanted her tea and Timmins was feeling her corns. They might, Miss Todd suggested, try the downhill road, and perhaps they would discover a cottage which served teas. She was mildly triumphant when at the end of the road she saw, standing back from it in a privet-girdled, old-fashioned garden, obviously, unmistakably an inn.

Why had she taken that particular road that day? She might have chosen the other and thus never, never have seen the spot fated to be her meeting-place with Fanny Anderson. Was it fore-ordained, written in the stars, that meeting, with all its consequences for both of them? Miss Todd did not know, never had known. Perhaps Fanny knew now? Again Miss Todd shivered. They must be nearly at the cemetery by this. It was not far. . . .

There was a bush of white broom just inside the gate. A long path of crazy paving, with borders of tulips, only beginning to widen and fade, led to the door. An early bee droned above the broom. Swallows had nested under the low eaves. She watched their swoop and flight as she waited in the porch for the door to be opened. The inn was small, dark, brooding, remote. A thin woman, wearing a gay apron over her black dress, answered Miss Todd's ring. Yes, she could have tea. Miss Todd stepped into a little hall, smelling of furniture-polish, with a grandfather clock, an oak gate-legged table, a stuffed fox in a case, and a steel engraving of the trial of Charles the First. Across the hall was a long and narrow drawing-room, with chintz-covered chairs and sofa, a piano, a table or two, and windows framing a tangled garden. Miss Todd gazed out across the clumps of aubretia and mounds of alyssum. Everything was very quiet. She thought, with a shudder, of the procession of vehicles stopping before the Green Dragon, the ever-changing faces at every meal, the impossibility of finding a peaceful corner in drawing-room or lounge where she could read or write a letter undisturbed by neighbouring conversations or people playing the piano. Here there might be peace. . . .

"Timmins?"

"Yes, Miss Emily?"

"Don't you think it would be rather nice to stay here for a little?"

Timmins pondered the matter. She was not enamoured of the Green Dragon, but if Miss Emily were going to bury herself in a country inn, scarcely to be dignified by the name of hotel, she might as well have stopped at Little Batnors. On the other hand, Timmins would not have to cope with that impudent chambermaid, who seemed to think that the lady's maid ought to do her work, and she did not like to see Miss Emily so unhappy as she obviously was at the Green Dragon. Timmins compromised by saying that Miss Emily might make inquiries. Perhaps the bedrooms would not be comfortable. "It's only an inn, Miss Emily, not a proper hotel."

"I know, but——"

The arrival of tea interrupted Miss Todd's sentence.

Odd that all these years afterwards—thirty years—she remembered the pattern of the old-fashioned, wide-mouthed cups. It had been a trellis-work of red and green which ran over the edges and twined round the handles. The tea itself was country fare: cream, fresh bread, buttered thickly, hot scones, a delicious cake, obviously home-baked, and damson jam in a flat glass dish. Miss Todd hinted to Timmins that if this were a sample of the meals provided they would do very well to shift their camp.

"Yes, Miss Emily."

The meal finished, Miss Todd explored the ground floor. The dining-room, dark-beamed, its walls hung with faded sporting prints, the little smoking-room, a damp slip furnished with obsolete equipment for writing and a battered Whitaker's Almanac—all had an old-fashioned flavour which appealed to her. She rang a bell and the thin woman appeared, wearing a wintry smile.

"I was wondering"—Miss Todd gazed about her rather helplessly—"if you accommodate visitors?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"There are just my maid and myself."

"It's quiet here."

"I don't mind. I find the hotel where I'm staying rather noisy."

"Well, if you'd like to see upstairs."

Miss Todd followed the black-clad back.

The stairs were wide and polished and ran up to a broad landing off which dark doors opened. The floors were uneven; the door-handles shaky. A mingled smell of lavender and furniture-polish hung in the air. The bedrooms were not large, but the outlook over the garden and a vista of field and low hill beyond charmed Miss Todd. She liked the white-painted furniture, the patchwork counterpanes on the beds, the large wardrobes and old-fashioned wash-stands, so different from the built-in cupboards and running water at the Green Dragon. Terms, when she inquired diffidently about these, seemed very reasonable. Mr. Massey could not call her extravagant. She arranged to come the following day. Might she have the bedroom with the blue and white china and the picture *Cherry Ripe* over the mantelpiece?

She could see both now. The jug had a crack under the lip and the lid of the soap-dish was missing. The picture had faded, but the child in the

mob-cap, dangling the fruit, still smirked at her across the years. Were they still standing round the grave in the sunshine, or was Fanny's hearse, empty now, rattling away, back to the undertaker's establishment in Market Batnors?

She and Timmins arrived at the Woolpack on an evening of bird-song, with a sky of pale, faint blue overhead. Everything seemed very peaceful and remote. An elderly man carried up the luggage and at dinner a maid of indeterminate age waited. Afterwards Miss Todd sat by herself in the drawing-room, enjoying the quiet, the sense of solitude, the absence of traffic. From time to time Timmins looked in, and at nine o'clock Miss Todd rang for and was brought tea. Scents from the garden stole in through the open windows. She knitted and glanced over a stack of elderly magazines. A week or two here, possibly another venture further afield, and then she might go home. Mr. Massey had hinted that the house required doing-up. Papa had disliked work-people, so that some papering and painting was really necessary. Miss Todd decided to have her bedroom redecorated, or possibly she might move into the larger one next door with the same view.

She never did. It was Fanny who had had that bedroom from the first. For thirty years Fanny slept in it, and four nights ago Fanny had died in it. Miss Todd could not bring herself to move there now, not after all these years, all those associations, but it would make a nice spare bedroom.

Fanny hated visitors. All along she had set her face against them. Now it would be pleasant to invite a friend to spend a few days.

Only—— Whom? Dismally Miss Todd realized that except for Fanny—Fanny now dead and by this time presumably buried—she had no friends. Fanny had discouraged callers, held at arms' length old acquaintances, snubbed new ones. Suddenly Miss Todd recollected how inevitably Fanny had always been there. At meals, in the drawing-room, on walks, Fanny's presence, if not requested, had remained, solid, immovable, overshadowing. There could be no conversation with a third person alone. Fanny had remained when, Miss Todd now saw, a little tact would have persuaded her to disappear temporarily. Except at night, or—her lips curved with sour amusement—in her bath, Miss Todd had never been free from the society of Fanny Anderson.

Devotion? Certainly it had looked like it, but Miss Todd now saw that Fanny's perpetual surveillance had been based on fear. Fanny knew the material with which she had to deal. If she could supervise, sway, and dominate Miss Todd, others, given similar opportunities, might do the same. There must be no others and no opportunities. This had been Fanny's policy. She had isolated Miss Todd from any danger—danger to Fanny, that was—which might accrue from her lawyer, her old friends, her clergyman, her neighbours. Now that she remembered the burden of all their advice had been the same. When any opportunity arose each and all told her that she had better get rid of Fanny Anderson. Fanny was surprisingly unpopular. Mr. Massey and Sybil Karslake were both alarmingly outspoken. If only she had listened to them, Miss Todd's heart cried, but it was too late now, too late by thirty years. . . .

As she sat in the dim, sun-faded, oblong drawing-room the old clock outside ticked companionably. The night was growing duskish. She summoned Timmins and went upstairs.

Timmins brushed Miss Todd's hair, still abundant, if greyish, by candle-light and talked with unusual volubility. The Woolpack, it appeared, was owned by Mr. Bowles, a widower, and the thin woman, Mrs. Roper, was his sister-in-law. Timmins had had supper in their private parlour and afterwards Mr. Bowles had showed her some clever card tricks. The late Mrs. Bowles, it transpired, had suffered all her life from digestive trouble and her last illness had been painful and expensive. There was no family. Miss Todd took in these details vaguely. She was sleepy and they barely impinged on her consciousness.

It rained next day.

She sat by herself, save when she went into the little dining-room for meals at which Timmins joined her. On a wet morning it appeared less attractive. The sporting prints were damp-spotted and the thick growth of ivy framing the small-paned windows cast a greenish shade over everything. The food was well-cooked, but Miss Todd had not much appetite. The rain beat down, making the garden a sodden blur. When she returned to the drawing-room she found herself shivering. How trying, how annoying if she were to develop a cold! Now that she remembered she had been caught in a heavy shower two days earlier and perhaps some latent chill had taken possession of her. The drawing-room felt clammy and airless. Somebody had shut the windows. Miss Todd gazed through the rain-streaked glass at soaked bushes and blossom downbeat by wind and heavy showers. What a difference a gleam of sun made! Should she ring and ask for a fire? Papa thought fires once May had come a shameful self-indulgence. She shivered and burned alternately through the endless afternoon, played with tea, shuddered from dinner, and went to bed directly afterwards. Timmins, it floated through her mind, bemused by encroaching illness, was not as attentive as usual. She brought Miss Todd a hot-water bottle and suggested aspirin, but when it was discovered that her mistress possessed none Timmins did not offer to go out and purchase any. Miss Todd told herself that it was unreasonable to expect Timmins to walk several miles to Derriford through the rain in order to find a chemist's and procure aspirin, yet not to suggest doing so savoured of indifference, verging on neglect. Miss Todd tossed and turned, at intervals hugging the hot-water bottle to her chest and then pitching it out of bed as her body felt on fire. She was, she decided, very ill. Hotels hated illness. She saw herself removed by ambulance to a nursing-home, a strange one, and dying surrounded by alien faces. Timmins would have to accompany her lifeless remains back to be laid beside her father and mother. They had a family grave in the cemetery at Market Batnors.

Fanny was not buried with them. The one thing Miss Todd would not do was to bury Fanny in a Todd sepulchre, as though she had been a relation. Miss Todd had purchased a separate grave and in time she intended to erect a tombstone with a suitable inscription. *Fanny Anderson, beloved, irreplaceable friend.* Yes, something like that. When one came to think of it half the inscriptions one read on tombstones were probably lies. . . .

To her own feeble surprise she survived the night. Timmins, coming in next morning in insultingly excellent health, suggested tea and toast and a doctor. Miss Todd spurned the idea of tea and toast and rejected the proffered doctor. She did not know of any in Derriford. Timmins

offered to consult the widower, Mr. Bowles, whose experience of doctors, on his wife's behalf, was surely to be trusted. Miss Todd shuddered and refused. All day she lay in bed, lonely, alone, apprehensive, visited at suspiciously lengthy intervals by Timmins, and once by Mr. Bowles' sister-in-law. As a means of cheering up Miss Todd Mrs. Roper opined that she had caught a nasty chill and many such often turned to pneumonia. Cases illustrative of the same, all known to and authenticated by Mrs. Roper, were offered by way of consolation. Miss Todd pretended to be asleep.

Half-awake, stupid with her illness, she heard voices outside her door. Had Timmins disobeyed her and sought a doctor? Her ears caught whispers.

"Looks like a chill to me, but you never know." This was Mrs. Roper.

"Shall I go in?"

"What good could you do?"

"I might see if there's anything she wants."

"Oh, she's got her maid."

The owner of the unknown voice laughed. Miss Todd quivered as she recalled Fanny's laugh. She had a definite laugh of her own, a peculiar Puckish little chuckle, as though she alone were in possession of some secret, a fascinating, delicious secret, known only to herself, and the chuckle betrayed her rich enjoyment of the same. Fanny did not often laugh, but when she did Miss Todd felt small, scared, cowed. Fanny's laugh was invariably the prelude to some disagreeable demand, some further encroachment on Miss Todd's purse, privacy, or liberty. Oh, you fool, Emily Todd, you fool!

A hand knocked softly. She croaked: "Come in."

Fanny Anderson—of course she did not know then that this was Fanny Anderson—walked into Miss Todd's bedroom, into her life, never departing from it until four days ago.

Fanny. . . .

With blurred gaze Miss Todd took in that the new-comer was small. She wore a mackintosh and a weather-proof hat. Her age might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty. Although they had lived together in the closest intimacy for three decades Miss Todd had never ascertained Fanny Anderson's exact age. Fanny did not volunteer the information and Miss Todd did not ask her. In any case, she realized with a certain clear-sighted contempt, if she had done so in all probability Fanny would have told her a lie.

"Good afternoon."

"Oh! Good afternoon."

"I'm so sorry you're ill."

Miss Todd was sorry too.

"Mrs. Roper told me they had a visitor who wasn't well. Don't let me intrude, but isn't there anything I could get you?"

Mr. Massey reproached her, remonstrated with her for letting Fanny gain such an ascendancy from the first, but, Miss Todd had argued feebly, what else could she do? She felt physically and morally unable to throw Fanny's kindness back in her face. A stranger, ill, unsupported by Timmins, she lay in bed without so much as an aspirin by way of relief, and Fanny, completely unknown to her, under no obligation to her, was standing there,

offering to go out in the rain, if necessary, to seek for succour. She murmured thanks, apologies, and if Miss—Miss——

“Anderson—Fanny Anderson.”

“My name’s Emily Todd.”

“Well, can’t I do anything, Miss Todd?”

“You’re extremely kind, but I have my maid.”

“Then why doesn’t she look after you? Mrs. Roper’s busy. She’s got the cooking and so on, but your maid is here to do what you need, isn’t she?”

“I—I suppose so.”

“I should certainly think she is. I’ll have a word with her and tell her that she has no right to neglect you so shamefully.”

Miss Todd felt a faint alarm. Timmins had been at the Croft so long that she had become a privileged person and disliked even her mistress finding fault. How would she react to blame, reproach, a tart pointing out of her failure to attend to her duties if these came from a complete stranger? Feebly Miss Todd muttered that Timmins could not really do much. She had come in at intervals.

“I dare say. When she wasn’t employed looking after her own interests. Don’t worry. I’ll settle her. Now, what about you, Miss Todd? These chills are nasty. Have you taken some aspirin?”

“N-no. I hadn’t any.”

“Then why couldn’t your maid have gone out and got you some?”

Miss Todd had thought precisely the same, but resented having it put into words.

“It’s raining, isn’t it?”

“Well, she wouldn’t melt.” Miss Anderson laughed. “I’ll just run down to Derriford and get you a bottle. Is there anything else you can think of?”

No, really there was not. Miss Todd murmured grateful acknowledgments of the stranger’s kindness, but aspirins were all she needed. Miss Anderson was disappearing when the invalid feebly recalled her. Her purse was in her hand-bag, hanging on the back of that chair. Would Miss Anderson take some money to pay for the aspirins?

“Oh, you can give it to me another time.”

“I’d sooner you had it now.”

Miss Anderson (rather ostentatiously, Miss Todd recalled afterwards) extracted a half-crown and held it up for inspection. Miss Todd nodded weakly, closed her eyes, and heard the door shut.

She had no occasion to go to her bag for a few days and her illness might have made her stupid and forgetful, but she had certainly thought that there were four sovereigns and about fifteen shillings in silver in her purse. Miss Anderson had taken (and displayed) one half-crown, which reduced the loose silver to twelve and sixpence, yet Miss Todd could only find nine shillings and three sovereigns. Could anybody have stolen the rest? Timmins was above suspicion. The elderly woman who represented the sole domestic staff had been in the room one or twice to do some surface dusting, but Miss Todd could swear that she was nowhere near the bag. A suspicion, uneasy, nebulous, haunted her, until she banished it sternly. Miss Anderson had told her what the aspirins cost, handed her the little bill for them together with the change out of the half-crown, and refused,

almost offensively, to accept payment for her bus fares to and from Derri-ford on the errand. No, no, impossible, fantastic, ridiculous to suspect her.

The stranger had come back in a surprisingly short time, given Miss Todd two of the aspirins in water, and announced that she was staying at the inn for a few days and could do anything Miss Todd required. Miss Todd was sleepy and dozed off, realizing vaguely later that Timmins, coming in to settle her for the night, looked sulky and upset. How awkward if Miss Anderson, out of pure good-heartedness, had hinted that Timmins was neglecting her mistress! It was really no business of hers, however kind and efficient she had been in the matter of the aspirins.

During the days of her illness Miss Todd was to discover how extremely kind and efficient Fanny Anderson could be.

She wriggled uneasily in her luxurious bed. She must not forget—she ought never to forget—how miserable she was at that little hotel, and how good Fanny showed herself to an utter stranger. Why, first thing she summoned Timmins and spoke to her about her indifference and unkindness to Miss Todd. Did she suppose, demanded Miss Anderson, that she had been brought here in order to flirt with the hotel proprietor? The accusation, made in Miss Todd's presence, came as a distinct shock. Had the widower Mr. Bowles some intention of inviting Timmins to fill his wife's place? Timmins, bristling, blushing, intimated that he had. Well, until the wedding took place Timmins was still in Miss Todd's service, was she not?

Fanny, not Miss Todd, asked the question. Timmins countered it by promptly giving Miss Todd notice. This was direly inconvenient, but whilst Miss Todd wept feebly after Timmins had flounced out of the room Fanny indicated gently that Timmins would have abandoned Miss Todd at an early date in any case to marry Mr. Bowles. Miss Todd really had no right to blame Fanny for that. She had only spoken to Timmins exactly as Miss Todd of course ought to have done, but was afraid to. Fanny had no fear of servants. In the lifetime of Miss Todd's parents they had stayed for years—real family treasures—yet Fanny seemed to possess a knack of rubbing them and their successors up the wrong way. Often they only withdrew their notice when Miss Todd implored them, as a personal favour to herself, to stay on, and, without telling Fanny, raised their wages. It was a little awkward, as Fanny always paid these, and they had to come to Miss Todd afterwards to be given the promised addition. Miss Todd kept a different banking account for such little secrecies, and Fanny never knew. She wouldn't ever know now. Oh, blessed thought!

It was Fanny who dealt with the affair of Timmins, solely, of course, to spare Miss Todd unpleasantness. Fanny, smiling, assured, undertook to nurse Miss Todd and act as her maid until she found a suitable substitute for Timmins, and the latter, sulky, tearful, more than inclined to take back her notice, was obliged to acquiesce and depart. Miss Todd felt vaguely unhappy about Timmins. She had been with the Todd family for years, and once this little unpleasantness blew over might at least have agreed to see her Miss Emily convalescent and *en route* for home. Again, it was Fanny who pointed out pleasantly how much better it would be to pay Timmins her month's wages and be rid of her. Where would she go? That, Fanny, with compressed lips, gently explained, really did not concern

Miss Todd. There was no necessity for her to agitate herself and retard her recovery by worrying about Timmins. She could easily find modest accommodation elsewhere until the proprietor of the Woolpack requested her to name the day. If he ever did, Fanny added darkly. She was always hinting things about people, things which roused faint, miserable suspicions in Miss Todd's alarmed mind. Before Fanny suggested the contrary Miss Todd had never imagined Mr. Bowles' intentions towards Timmins to be other than honourable. Then how could she—here Miss Todd became additionally feverish and excitable—leave Timmins stranded in a strange town, with no one to help her to find another post should Mr. Bowles not fulfil his obligations? Fanny had told Timmins plainly that her former mistress would not recommend her. Miss Todd had been perfectly willing to recommend Timmins, but Fanny pointed out suavely that Timmins, throwing up her situation in a temper, must expect no such indulgence and consideration. Besides—Fanny's voice and eyes dropped—Timmins could not be quite impecunious or without resources. She had no doubt received excellent wages, and had dear Miss Todd never missed little items, loose change or small pieces of jewellery? Dear Miss Todd could not truthfully say that she had, unless the money from her purse—— She told Fanny about this and Fanny looked grieved and shocked. Then didn't that show that Timmins was not to be trusted? She was the only person who had had access to Miss Todd's bag and purse. It was this dark doubt of Timmins' honesty, implanted in Miss Todd's unsuspicious mind by Fanny, which had ultimately persuaded her that Timmins had better go at once. Miss Todd had never seen her or heard of her since. Several times she had proposed another visit to Derriford, of course with dearest Fanny, suggesting that they should stay at the Woolpack and no doubt find Timmins installed as Mrs. Bowles, but Fanny always objected. She had not cared for Derriford, except that it was Derriford which had introduced her to dearest Emily.

Certainly Fanny had been very kind and capable after Timmins left. She undertook everything: the nursing, the giving of orders to the hotel staff, even Miss Todd's mending. She made an exquisite job of a tear in Miss Todd's point lace bertha and then tried it on playfully herself, in order, she explained, to let Miss Todd see how skilfully she had drawn together the tricky, minute threads. Of course Miss Todd had felt obliged to ask her to accept the bertha, alleging that it became her better than Miss Todd and would lighten a dark dress, and Fanny, after suitable demur, took the gift. Miss Todd suffered many pangs at parting with her mother's lace, but Fanny was being so very kind, so exceedingly kind, all for a complete stranger, and one could hardly offer her money. The obligation naturally was wholly on Miss Todd's side. She took Fanny's time, Fanny's strength, Fanny's company, and Fanny really had been wonderful. There was the incident of the hot-water bottle.

Miss Todd blinked rapidly, remembering that hot-water bottle. Her own, a tried favourite, sprang a leak, a spiteful, irreparable leak, and with the fretful unreasonableness of a convalescent Miss Todd demanded a successor. The hotel's resources proving unequal to the requirement, it was Fanny—patient, knowledgeable Fanny—who scoured Derriford in quest of the desired article, Miss Todd felt ashamed when she recollected how cross she had been at Fanny's non-success in finding exactly what she

wanted. Finally, the good creature, without saying a word to Miss Todd, wrote to a London shop and ordered the best of its kind. Unfortunately by the time it arrived Derriford was in the grip of a heat-wave, so that a hot-water bottle seemed a superfluous and unnecessary gift, but that did not alter or minimize Fanny's kindness in going to so much trouble and expense to procure one. The bottle was quite a nice bottle, a little smaller than Miss Todd's previous treasure, but had cost nearly double. No doubt London goods were more expensive than Market Batnors ones or rubber had advanced in price. Miss Todd experienced the greatest difficulty in extracting from Fanny what she had paid for the bottle in order to reimburse her. She, so much the better-off of the two, the gainer by the transaction, could not possibly allow Fanny to be at any loss. In the end Miss Todd refunded the amount expended, but in order to soothe Fanny's hurt pride and lacerated feelings (there had been quite a little scene ere Miss Todd won her way) she presented her with a valuable brooch which, like the lace, was once Mamma's, and a warm kiss. These closed the incident satisfactorily, though Miss Todd had thought it a trifle odd that the day she was leaving the Woolpack, amongst a litter of torn papers, she should have come across a receipt from the Army and Navy Stores for one rubber hot-water bottle price—— Well, the price was certainly a good deal less than what Fanny told Miss Todd the hot-water bottle procured especially for her had cost. Perhaps Fanny had bought another. She might have wanted one herself, or there was Mrs. Roper. Fanny had spoken vaguely of Mrs. Roper's having been kind to her, and possibly she wished to make some return. The bill could hardly have been for the bottle she had given Miss Todd. Oh, no!

It was Fanny who suggested that she should escort Miss Todd home again. A journey, even with the ease and comfort procurable through money, was tiring, especially to a convalescent. Fanny could take the tickets beforehand, reserve seats, pack Miss Todd's trunk, and all she had to do was to step into a taxi and be driven to the station. Miss Todd accepted the proposal and felt in duty bound to invite Fanny to pay her a visit. Possibly she might find some post through friends of Miss Todd's where her abilities would enjoy full scope. Fanny had been perfectly frank about herself. Directly Miss Todd was on the road to recovery she heard Fanny's simple history.

After this lapse of years Miss Todd could not remember whether Fanny had said in so many words that she was the daughter of a clergyman. She spoke of Derriford cathedral and murmured that her father had been connected with it. He had died two years previously. Miss Todd was left with the impression that he was highly preferred, a dean perhaps, but alas! simple, unworldly, and at the mercy of those eager to take advantage of these excellent qualities. On his death Fanny, an only child, was left with very little money. Her mother was dead many years. "Why," Miss Todd exclaimed, "how like my own case! I was the only one and for years my father and I were together."

"Ah, but you——" Fanny left the sentence unfinished.

"I——? What, dear?"

She was calling Fanny 'dear' by this time. Fanny had requested her to drop the formal 'Miss Anderson', and Miss Todd could hardly do less than tell Fanny to call her Emily.

"You were left with a home. I have none."

She said it very quietly, sitting by Miss Todd's bed, her hands linked in her lap. Impulsively Miss Todd took one of the hands and squeezed it. Fanny sighed.

"Poor Father! He knew that he ought to have saved, but I suppose he imagined that I might marry, and in his position there were so many expenses."

"Of course. Aren't the clergy expected to entertain a great deal?"

Across the years Miss Todd remembered Fanny's start, her swift look of puzzlement, followed by her little laugh. That laugh. . . .

Fanny wasn't laughing now, unless where she was she knew how she had, for once, been outwitted, overreached.

"Yes. I know that Mr. Waring—our rector—keeps open house, and Mrs. Waring says they are always having stray people to meals, or putting someone up, deputations, missionaries coming to preach."

"Oh, I see."

"That was what you meant, wasn't it?"

"Exactly. You are so understanding."

Fanny sighed gently and withdrew her hand from Miss Todd's caressing clasp.

"I had to do something. Father was old-fashioned and didn't realize that a woman needs a training if she has to earn her living. I'm not clever at anything."

"Oh, you are. Look at the way you solved nearly all that acrostic we were doing yesterday."

"Nonsense!" Fanny's laugh dismissed the praise directly.

"And so you——?"

"I went to be companion to an old lady."

"And was it not—not congenial?"

Fanny shook her head sorrowfully. Probably there were faults on both sides. She had done her best, but——

"I'm sure you did. I expect you were over-conscientious. Did you find this old lady unkind?"

"Not unkind—no, but very difficult to please. And the servants were a—a problem. They thought me not much better than themselves and disliked having to wait on me. I tried my hardest not to give trouble."

Fanny's smile was a watery affair. Miss Todd gazed at her in silent admiration. What reticence, what dignity, what ladylike reserve! Her few admissions obviously concealed and cloaked innumerable small humiliations, petty tyrannies, subtle pinpricks all endured in the course of her employment, yet without rancour or resentment. Miss Todd's heart swelled. When Fanny stayed with her it must be as a guest, a valued, honoured guest, welcome, pressed to remain indefinitely. The house was so large, so well-staffed, that Fanny's presence would not cause a ripple on the smooth waters of Miss Todd's domestic arrangements.

"And had you to leave?" she inquired hesitatingly.

"I was obliged to." Fanny compressed her lips. "Mrs.—— Oh, her name doesn't matter—the old lady had a nephew, and he——"

"Did he want to marry you?" Miss Todd trod, awed, to the very fringes of a romance. "And she was horrid and interfered? Oh!"

"I couldn't have accepted him, Emily." Fanny smiled and sighed.

"But of course it wasn't to be expected that she would see that from my point of view."

"No, certainly not."

"It made things too impossible for me. I left, and I've been trying one or two ways of supporting myself. Not very successfully, I'm afraid." The watery smile still held, but showed signs of wavering. "At present I'm what they call unemployed, so I came here for a little rest whilst I looked out for something else."

"And first thing you devote yourself to looking after me. Dear Fanny!"

"Dearest Emily! I've been only too glad to."

"I believe Providence sent you here. Supposing I had been left alone, no Timmins, nobody to trouble. Why, I might have died."

"Poor Emily! I shall have to be very careful of you for a good while." Fanny laughed again, this time on a note of dreariness. "Oh, how silly I am!"

"You? Why, dear?"

"Because I talked of looking after you as though—as though we were going to be together always."

Fanny gazed into space. Her eyes were moist.

Always! A little chill hand seemed to reach out and touch Miss Todd. After all, how much did she know of Fanny Anderson except what Fanny chose to tell her? If they came home together, once established, it might be difficult to dislodge Fanny. And yet, could she fling back the kindly offer of Fanny's helpful companionship on the journey, which Miss Todd secretly dreaded without Timmins, and withdraw the invitation to stay at the Croft? A visit was not a permanency. A guest was not a paid dependant. Ah, but a paid dependant could have her engagement terminated as a visitor could not. Sternly Miss Todd put away the thought. How ungrateful, how unkind she was! Fanny had probably saved her life. It was a small return to give her a brief hospitality. Miss Todd would bestir herself to find Fanny an amply remunerated and congenial post, possibly in the neighbourhood of Little Batnors, and they could continue on terms of friendship.

Only—— What could Fanny do? The days of the helpless gentlewoman who filled the rôle of ornamental companion were practically over. As Fanny herself—so clear-sighted and sensible of her—had said, training and efficiency were required. Perhaps Miss Todd might secure her a secretaryship, or, if offered tactfully, Fanny might accept the fees for some establishment which imparted knowledge of a domestic nature. Once equipped, there was no saying what doors would not be open to her. Miss Todd's sheltered life had perhaps left her slightly old-fashioned, but now a gentlewoman such as Fanny, working for her living, earning her bread, was yearly growing more of a commonplace. Fanny was so practical, so sure of herself, so calm, that she was bound to do to perfection anything she undertook. She was not like Miss Todd, hesitant, easily swayed, influenced by the last speaker, weak. . . .

She knew now that this was what she had been all along, idiotically, culpably weak. Fanny must have seen it from the first.

The days slipped past. Miss Todd was fully recovered and found herself disinclined to remain longer at the Woolpack Inn. She hinted at a return home. Fanny was acquiescent and agreeable. Whenever dearest Emily

liked she was ready to accompany her, but might it not be wiser to stay for another week or ten days? The weather was unsettled and she, Fanny, would never forgive herself if Emily took cold on the journey. She was leaving that week——

"Leaving? But why, Fanny?"

Fanny smiled, gently, sadly. "I can't afford to stay longer, my dear."

"Oh!" Miss Todd felt embarrassed, uncomfortable, conscience-stricken. She knew that Fanny was poor. The inn, although a small concern, did charge as much as an hotel. Had Fanny been spending her savings in order to remain under the same roof as Miss Todd? She hinted at this stumbingly.

"Well, dear, I did not like to say anything when you were so unwell. It wouldn't have been fair to burden you with my little worries." Fanny smiled, this time a patient, martyr-like smile. "But I do find the amount I have to pay here rather more than I can manage indefinitely." Her voice brightened. "Now, you're not to think any more about it. I've taken a room quite near and I can come every day and see if there's anything you want done for you, and it'll be perfectly all right."

"Oh, but—— I didn't know—— I hadn't realized——"

"Of course not, dear. I understand perfectly."

"I wish you wouldn't go away, Fanny. It'll mean your turning out in all weathers just to see whether I require a penny stamp." It was Miss Todd's turn to laugh.

"I don't mind in the least."

"No, but I do, Fanny"—Miss Todd hesitated—"I do think that I need another week or so here. Will you stay on as—as my guest? Please do. I feel so—so inconsiderate letting you stop at your own expense all this time just to look after me so kindly."

"You mustn't feel that, Emily."

"But I do. Please, Fanny."

"Well——"

"You can cancel this other room, can't you?"

"Oh, quite easily, but——"

"Then do, dear, and we'll have a happy little time together. I'll tell Mrs. Roper that I've asked you and I'd like you to have the bedroom next to mine."

It was settled astonishingly easily after a further slight protest from Fanny.

Miss Todd felt increasingly sorry for Fanny as the days went on. What a sad life she had, so full of disappointments. An aunt from whom she expected money had sunk everything in an annuity. She hinted at a broken engagement. Her future, she admitted, was uncertain, but after a little visit to dearest Emily's delightful home she was going to feel quite different and ready for everything. Miss Todd hoped so, and felt in duty bound to add that Fanny must not hurry away. Fanny shook her head archly. She did not want to outstay her welcome. Miss Todd protested that there was no fear of that. She longed to show Fanny the old house, the gardens, the hot-houses, and to introduce her to her friends.

"Are there many people living near you?"

"Not very many. Little Batnors is really just a village. There are the Warings, our rector and his wife (I've mentioned them, have I

not?), and Dr. Karslake and Sybil (he was so good to Papa), and Mr. Massey."

"Now, who is Mr. Massey, I wonder?"

Fanny's tone was arch. She cocked her head on one side, and her look was gay, teasing. Miss Todd's faded cheeks flushed.

"He's my lawyer and Papa left him my trustee. He looks after all my affairs, investments and so on. It was he who insisted that I must have a holiday and suggested Derriford."

"Oh! Does he know it?"

Fanny's question sounded casual, as though dictated by polite interest, but Miss Todd pondered whether she detected a shadow of something else, something like fear or annoyance. Oh, nonsense! What could it matter to Fanny Anderson whether Mr. Massey knew Derriford—her home town—or not, unless she hoped to discover that they had some mutual friends?

"I don't think so. It was very difficult to decide on anywhere special when the choice was so wide, and I told him I thought a cathedral town would be nice, and somehow we chose Derriford. How glad I am now that we did! If I'd gone somewhere else I mightn't have met you, Fanny dear."

"Dearest Emily! That is sweet of you."

Fanny embraced Miss Todd and murmured that she should always be grateful to this unknown Mr. Massey. Quite the *deus ex machina*, was he not? Miss Todd did not exactly grasp the meaning of this, but Fanny was so clever, so quick-witted, so informed and informative that no doubt something highly complimentary to Mr. Massey was intended. She must tell him what Fanny had called him.

"What is he like, Emily?"

"Mr. Massey? Oh, middle-aged, elderly, I suppose one would say. Papa thought a great deal of him. He always told me if I found myself in any difficulty that I was to consult Mr. Massey."

"I see. How fortunate you are to have him constantly at hand. Is his wife a great friend too?"

"Mr. Massey's a bachelor. It's a pity, I often think, as he would have made some woman a very good husband."

"It's never too late to mend." Fanny was once more arch and bright. Miss Todd's flush deepened.

Rather uneasily she wondered what Mr. Massey would think of Fanny. Surely he must admire her when he learned how kind and thoughtful she had been during Miss Todd's illness, and saw for himself how executive and capable she was? Perhaps Mr. Massey might be able to suggest some way in which Fanny could support herself after she left Miss Todd? Of course that would not be for a time. Fanny must not feel in the least compelled to hurry away. All the same, there would be no harm in consulting Mr. Massey, supposing that Fanny did not object, and ascertaining his views, soliciting his opinion. Miss Todd found herself looking forward to introducing her two friends, her old and her new one, to one another.

She left the Woolpack with mingled feelings. On the one hand it was the place where she had met and grown attached to Fanny Anderson. On the other, it had witnessed, and in a sense been responsible for, the severance from Timmins, a link with the past, with Papa, and more

a friend than a maid until Fanny discovered, exposed, and exhibited Timmins' unworthiness, ingratitude, and callousness. Poor Timmins! What would Mr. Massey say when Miss Todd returned home without her and found herself compelled to admit that Timmins had left Miss Todd's service? She could, of course, as Fanny reminded her when Miss Todd somewhat uneasily broached the matter, point out that it was Timmins who had given Miss Todd notice, not Miss Todd who had dismissed Timmins; but the affair was unsatisfactory, badly rounded-off, incomplete. Mr. Massey might think and declare that Miss Todd ought to have ascertained whether Timmins was really going to marry Mr. Bowles, and in any case what she was doing and where she was during the interregnum between her departure from Miss Todd's service and her marriage. Miss Todd wished that she knew.

The bill for her stay seemed surprisingly heavy. Of course it included Fanny's expenses as well as her own (the original week or ten days had extended to a fortnight), but Miss Todd really could not remember having all these alleged extras which mounted up to an absurdly high figure. She did not like to haggle or to dispute any item with Mrs. Roper, and it was not as though she hadn't plenty of money. Still—— Somewhat diffidently she asked Fanny if she would take the account and the cheque and bring back a receipt.

"Of course, dear. I think Mrs. Roper's in just now."

Miss Todd gave an uneasy little laugh.

"I must say the charges here are rather excessive. I paid much less at the Green Dragon."

"Oh?" Fanny looked politely puzzled.

"'Extras'. I wonder what are meant by those?"

"They always add on if there's been illness," Fanny explained quickly.

"But I didn't have anything then. As a matter of fact they've charged me for full board all that week I was in bed and eating practically nothing."

"Shall I ask Mrs. Roper about it for you?"

"No—no. You're most kind, Fanny, but I should hate any unpleasantness or—or disputing. I must just pay it, only I'm sure Mr. Massey will think I've been rather extravagant."

"Why need he know anything about it?"

Miss Todd explained gently. As her trustee, in addition to being her lawyer, Mr. Massey exercised full control over her money affairs. He would expect to be shown the bills for any expenses incurred during her holiday. Fanny sighed.

"You know you're paying for two people, Emily. I wish you would let me give you back my share."

"Certainly not. Besides, I had Timmins to pay for at the Green Dragon, and as I said, it cost less there."

"I feel most uncomfortable, dearest."

"You mustn't. Please pay Mrs. Roper, Fanny, and don't think any more about it."

After an absence Fanny returned with compressed lips. Rather ostentatiously she pointed out that the bill had been reduced by a considerable figure. Miss Todd exclaimed. How had Fanny managed that? She trusted that there had been no unpleasantness?

"Not at all. Mrs. Roper just thought she would take advantage of your having been ill and your—er—unworldliness. I soon showed her that I had seen through her tricks."

"You're wonderful, Fanny. I wish I could stand up for myself the way you do."

Fanny answered with a sharp flash of bitterness: "I've got to."

Miss Todd felt very uncomfortable. Uneasily she fingered the sovereigns and silver which Fanny had laid down beside the receipted bill. Would Fanny be offended? Hesitatingly, diffidently she spoke.

"Fanny, you've had a horrid interview with Mrs. Roper, I'm sure. It was too bad of me to let you go into all that with her instead of either facing her myself or just saying nothing and paying the bill." She held out the money. "Please take this and—and get any little thing you may want for your visit to me."

"No, Emily, certainly not. You mean it kindly, but——"

"If you don't, Fanny, I shall think I've hurt your feelings and been tactless and clumsy."

"Really, Emily, I'd rather not."

They argued until Miss Todd felt completely exhausted. It was only when she realized this that Fanny could be persuaded to do as Miss Todd wished. They kissed and Miss Todd suggested an early bedtime. Fanny shook her head. She had packing and last minute things which had to be done. Emily must pop off to bye-bye and not worry. Fanny would bring her a cup of something hot after she was in bed.

Outside the door Miss Todd encountered Mrs. Roper. She was smiling, made a pleasant remark, and did not look in the least as though she had fought a losing battle with Fanny over Miss Todd's bill. Rather uneasily Miss Todd wondered what Mr. Massey would say. She must tell him about the altered account, and if he disapproved of her offering Fanny the change and Fanny's acceptance of it, well, this could not be helped.

The start homewards was made on a perfect July day. Miss Todd remunerated the elderly woman and the man who had carried down the luggage, shook hands with Mr. Bowles and Mrs. Roper, and expressed a hope of paying a return visit some day. She noticed that Fanny, standing by, did not comment upon or endorse this. Miss Todd would have liked to ask Mr. Bowles about his marriage, to ascertain the date of his wedding to Timmins, even, if she could have done so without Fanny overhearing, secured from him Timmins' present whereabouts, but somehow she felt afraid. Fanny was urging her to get into the taxi. They had plenty of time, but she did not want dearest Emily to stand. Presumably she had made her farewells earlier, as beyond nodding generally to the little group collected around the door to watch the departure she did not notice any of them. The taxi slid down the road. The lime blossom was heavy and sweet. Miss Todd sighed.

"Tired, dear Emily?" Fanny inquired brightly.

"Oh, no, Fanny, thank you. How could I be? I had my breakfast in bed and you did all my packing."

"I wanted to save you as much as possible," Fanny answered earnestly.

The taxi hummed along. Miss Todd's hand was clasped in Fanny's. Fanny pressed Miss Todd's fingers gently before she withdrew her own.

The grass in the fields was very lush and green. The river reflected

the deep blue of the sky. Fanny had drawn up one window, but through the other, partly open, drifted warm sweet air and a scent of hay. They were haymaking outside the town.

Miss Todd had no regrets for leaving Derriford itself, but as she and Fanny drove through it on their way to the station she murmured that she was sorry to have been so much of an invalid during her stay at the Woolpack. Had she felt able for it they might have gone into Derriford sometimes, done some shopping, had tea at a café. A sudden pang of alarm smote her. Did Fanny realize how very quiet, how extremely remote Little Batnors was? "You're coming to quite a backwater, you know."

"I shan't mind. I like quiet, besides"—Fanny clasped Miss Todd's hand again—"I shall see all the more of you."

"Of course. And if we want a little amusement we can always go into Market Batnors."

"Where is that? What a quaint name!"

"It's our nearest town, about five miles off."

"Are you often there?"

"Only for shopping, and now and again there's a concert. I'm afraid you'll think it dreadfully behind the times, Fanny, such old-fashioned shops, and very ancient buses, and rather sleepy in every way. You can just dawdle across the road—there's so little traffic."

"It sounds heavenly, Emily."

"Well, not quite that, but it is a dear old town."

"There are buses to it, did you say?"

"Yes, and I have a pony and trap."

"Not a car?"

"Oh, no. Papa didn't approve of them."

"Haven't you ever thought a car would be nice?"

"I don't believe I'd have much use for one. And driving it might be a difficulty."

"Who drives the pony? You?"

"No; our old groom."

Fanny said no more. They were slowing up outside the station and she descended, very business-like and purposeful, to see that the luggage was taken charge of and to find out whether the train had come in.

The long express was waiting in a siding. A porter and Fanny escorted Miss Todd to a first-class compartment and her personal luggage was piled in the rack. Fanny nodded brightly and announced that she would go and look for her own seat.

"But, dear—— What do you mean? We've the whole carriage to ourselves."

"The thirds may be full if I don't hurry."

"The thirds? Fanny! When you took our tickets yesterday surely you didn't get a third-class one for yourself?"

"Of course, Emily. I'm not accustomed to travel in any other way. I couldn't afford to."

"But that's absurd—to-day, I mean. Please go and change your ticket and come in here."

"I'd rather not, thank you. You are paying for my ticket and I shouldn't like to put you to the expense of the difference between third and first."

"Fanny, please. There's no question of expense."

"I feel that there is."

Fanny spoke like a martyr. She looked like one, standing there, her head drooping a little, her aspect that of the poor relation, the individual who, thanks to an unkind fate, was doomed and destined all her days to travel third. Miss Todd felt slightly irritated. On this occasion there was no need for Fanny to travel third, to make a martyr of herself, to emphasize so subtly, yet so strongly, the contrast between her financial circumstances and Miss Todd's. Miss Todd harboured a faint suspicion that she enjoyed doing this, and yet, what advantage was it to her?

"Fanny, we needn't argue." She took some money out of her purse and pressed it into Fanny's unwilling hand. "We haven't much time. Please change your ticket and come back. I'll keep the other corner seat for you."

Fanny departed. Her retreating spine expressed reluctance, distaste, an obvious disinclination to fall in with Miss Todd's wishes. Miss Todd was shocked when she realized that she longed to have allowed Fanny her way and let her travel third. It would have meant that she passed the journey in peace, alone. * Alone! Day after day, since their acquaintance commenced, she never got away from Fanny—Fanny's advice, Fanny's executive suggestions and actions, Fanny's robust, slightly overwhelming presence. The most annoying thing about the incident was that Fanny, on her return, contrived to give Miss Todd the impression that she had changed the ticket solely to oblige dearest Emily, and she was sharing a first-class carriage in order to accommodate Miss Todd, whereas Fanny herself would really have preferred to travel third.

Miss Todd closed her eyes and leaned back. Fanny adjusted the window to her companion's liking and sat very still. The train steamed through rich, agricultural country, with clumps of black-and-white cattle dotted about the fields, and hedges and lanes a riot of wild roses, late may, fading laburnum, and the glories of summer foliage and flowers. Fanny was unobtrusive. She did not talk, but was always ready to get down Miss Todd's dressing-case from the rack if she required her flask of eau-de-Cologne, or to select suitable literature from the bundle of papers and magazines she had brought back from the bookstall. In order to save Miss Todd the journey between her compartment and the restaurant car Fanny had thoughtfully provided a luncheon-basket, packed by Mrs. Roper. Fanny apologized for their being only sufficient for one. Mrs. Roper must have misunderstood.

"Then you'll have lunch in the restaurant car, Fanny."

"No, no, dear. I'm really not hungry. I'll nibble some of this delicious chocolate you gave me, you kind person."

"It's not nearly enough. Here's the man to tell us the first luncheon's ready. Yes, you must. And don't hurry."

She gave Fanny a half-sovereign and saw her depart with feelings of mingled exasperation and relief.

Was it to be constantly thus, Fanny putting herself in the position of a martyr, assuming the status and halo of one, and Miss Todd compelled to persuade her to act to her own advantage—at Miss Todd's expense? She shrugged her shoulders. For a week or so, whilst Fanny was her guest, she might put up with it, but if Fanny paid her a long visit——

Thirty years was a very long one.

Had Fanny always expected Miss Todd to pay for everything? Even her funeral—— Fanny ought to have saved enough to defray the cost of her coffin and subsequent conveyance to the cemetery, but Miss Todd knew that the bills would go to her, be settled by her. Almost she could hear Fanny saying that dearest Emily would not have liked her Fanny to have the poor little funeral which was all she could afford. Well, it was the last expense Fanny was going to cost her, and, in a way, was cheap if it emphasized the blessed, bewildering fact that Fanny was never coming back. . . .

The rest of the journey was uneventful until just before its close. During the afternoon Miss Todd slept. She woke to find Fanny holding her hand-bag, closing it carefully. She gave it to the owner, saying, with a bright smile, that it slipped out of Miss Todd's clasp whilst she dozed.

"Oh, thank you, Fanny."

"You've had a nice forty winks. Now, what about tea?"

"I'd love a cup."

"I thought you would. I've ordered it. Dearest Emily, I hope that wasn't a liberty, but I do want you to travel as comfortably as possible."

"A liberty? No, indeed. How thoughtful of you!"

The tea was welcome, delicious, reviving. When paying for it Miss Todd was surprised to find how little her purse, down at the bottom of her hand-bag, contained. There was the change from the money Fanny had given her back after exchanging the railway ticket, and the change from the half-sovereign Miss Todd produced for Fanny's lunch, but there had been, there ought to be, more. Miss Todd could not understand it.

"Is something wrong, dear?" Fanny asked anxiously.

"Oh, no. I was only wondering what I'd done with all my money."

"I gave you back any change."

"I know. It's all here, but there was another sovereign or two and some loose silver in the little compartment with my stamps."

"How funny!"

"You said the bag slipped out of my hand when I was having that nap. Could it have fallen open and the money rolled out?"

"I don't think so. The clasp's quite firm, isn't it? Shall I look?"

"Oh, please don't trouble."

Fanny insisted that it was no trouble. She got down on her knees and groped about, feeling under the seats, pawing the strip of carpet, even lifting it. Miss Todd, faintly irritated, implored her to desist.

"You'll only get your hands all black, Fanny, and I'm sure you won't find anything."

"But, Emily——"

"But what?"

"It sounds—it sounds as though you thought I'd taken it."

"Fanny! Oh, this is horrible! I never dreamed——"

"You and I are the only people in the carriage. The money can't have melted. It's the most natural thing in the world that you'd perhaps think I—I opened your bag whilst you were asleep and—and took—and took——"

Fanny's voice faltered. Her face worked. She seemed on the verge of

tears. Miss Todd, flustered, alarmed, disgusted with her unquiet conscience which whispered that she *had* suspected Fanny, began to weep herself.

"Oh, Fanny! Poor Fanny! What a wretch I must be that you could even think I'd suspect you of anything so dreadful! Do forgive me, Fanny."

"You can look through my bag, if you like, Emily."

"No, no! Oh, Fanny!"

"I'm not blaming you. Anybody else would have thought the same."

"I didn't think it. I'm perfectly certain you'd never stoop to such meanness. Theft! Oh, Fanny!"

"It looked like it, Emily."

Fanny gazed sadly at Miss Todd. Her incipient tears had not fallen. She looked stern, reproachful, dry-eyed, almost as though she were the accuser and Miss Todd the culprit. The latter felt unspeakably wretched.

"I must have been mistaken, Fanny."

"I hope you are, Emily."

"I don't mean that. Oh, dear! What I meant was that I—I may have supposed that I had more money than is here."

Fanny said nothing. Her attitude was still accusing, unforgiving.

"Don't you know how much you carry?"

"N-no. I keep gold in the little morocco wallet in my dressing-case, but my loose money—I—I hadn't counted it. Very probably I was reckoning one sovereign as two, or something like that, and silver's so confusing."

Still Fanny sat rigid, sternly reproachful.

"I think that's most careless of you, Emily."

"I know, dear."

"You ought to put down every penny you spend, and count your change. Then there wouldn't be any muddle or mistake, and you would not be in a position to imagine that I——"

"Fanny, please don't say it again. I'm truly sorry. Let's forget about it. It was entirely my fault."

"I fear it was, Emily."

Miss Todd plucked up a little spirit.

"All the same, Fanny, it was you who—er—suggested that I might think you were—were responsible. I'm sure I never dreamed——"

"You shouldn't have let yourself get into such a position as to enable you to suspect me, or anybody else."

For thirty years Fanny had pursued the same policy. For thirty years she had contrived, by means which Miss Todd found herself unable to circumvent, fathom, or rival, to place Miss Todd invariably in the wrong. Even in this, the very first instance of it, she intimated by her manner, if not in words, that Miss Todd's extreme carelessness in money matters was alone responsible for the unpleasant suspicion Miss Todd had harboured as to Fanny Anderson's honesty. Miss Todd writhed at the remembrance. She was the loser, the one who had had every right to complain. Yet Fanny, by indicating that Miss Todd had been unbusinesslike, thoughtless, and unable to substantiate any accusation she might bring against Fanny or anybody else, placed her at a disadvantage and posed as the injured, the unjustly suspected, the blameless. Oh, it was not fair!

She repeated helplessly: "I'm sorry, Fanny."

"You ought to be. It—it was insulting."

"But I never said——"

"You may not have said in so many words that you had thought I had taken money out of your purse, but you implied that I had."

"Oh, Fanny!"

"It's no use sitting there saying 'Oh, Fanny!' You've—you've insulted me, Emily, unpardonably. I think our acquaintance had better stop. I'll see you home safely—you're so helpless, and I mustn't forget that you have been ill—but directly you are there I shall leave you."

"Where—where shall you go?"

"That doesn't matter. I can find somewhere, I suppose. What matters is that I can hardly bring myself to accept your hospitality knowing all the time that you think you are harbouring and entertaining a thief."

For a few minutes Miss Todd sat very still, gazing at Fanny Anderson. Fanny sat wrapped in an injured and implacable silence. A wasp hovered outside the window, buzzed, and flew away again. The train was passing a cluster of little cottages, their red roofs standing up amidst the surrounding green. Save for the monotonous rattle of the wheels everything seemed curiously, unnaturally still.

Lying in bed on the day of Fanny's burial, re-living over again that unpleasant episode, Miss Todd wondered wretchedly, helplessly, whether her life might have been entirely different had she for once asserted herself, taken Fanny at her word, and allowed her to depart in dudgeon. What would Fanny have said? Would she have acquiesced meekly, vanished, and Miss Todd seen no more of her, heard nothing further from her ever again? Was it not more probable, knowing Fanny as she now knew her, that she would have maintained her injured attitude for a little while and then withdrawn her decision to leave Miss Todd? Fanny—Miss Todd's lip curled—knew when she had got hold of a good thing. She would have explained that she had been hasty, her feelings were so hurt by such an unjust suspicion and harboured, if unuttered, accusation, and she had perhaps lost her temper, but dearest Emily must not mind. They would both forget all about it, and of course Fanny was not going to leave her. She was so looking forward to her delightful visit. Now, it was all perfectly, beautifully all right, wasn't it? Emily remembered drearily how any argument, any contention with Fanny, any disagreement, however trifling and unimportant, which arose between them, had always ended in the same way. Fanny, the aggressor, forgave her when she had done nothing. She was invariably humbled, humiliated, abject, and Fanny triumphant, more firmly established than ever, and prepared to be magnanimous and gracious. It was no use. Even if she had accepted Fanny's indignant announcement that she was taking Miss Todd home and then abandoning her, Fanny would somehow have contrived to remain, and not merely to remain. She would have given Miss Todd the impression that it was extremely good of her to do so, and she, Emily, ought to be thankful, more tactful in future, and to compensate Fanny's injured feelings and lowered prestige by increased devotion and gratitude.

At length Miss Todd ventured to speak. "Fanny?"

"Yes, Emily?"

"I have apologized. I think you should accept my apology."

"I am quite willing to, but it doesn't alter the fact that you thought such a dreadful thing of me."

"I'm very sorry."

The journey and the scene—that idiotic, humiliating scene—seemed to go on interminably. Bitterly Miss Todd regretted that they had the compartment to themselves. A third person, a stranger, would have silenced Fanny. As it was she continued to reproach Miss Todd, to repeat over and over again how cruelly hurt her feelings were by her dearest Emily even imagining that she could rob her. Yes, Emily. A raised hand and a grieved head-shake checked Miss Todd's anguished protest. That was exactly what Miss Todd had thought. Fanny was quite willing to concede that Miss Todd had not actually put it into words. Not definitely had she said: Fanny Anderson, you stole my money, but she had thought it, hinted at it, when all the time—she herself admitted it—she was far from certain as to the amount her purse contained. Miss Todd was accustomed to handling money. It was apt to lead to carelessness, and in this case, before formulating such a terrible suspicion and accusation, she ought to have counted carefully every coin, every sovereign, calculated every item of expenditure.

"Yes, I—I know, Fanny. It was careless of me."

"Of course your case isn't like mine. I have to reckon every half-penny. Being a rich woman, you can spend as you please and not trouble about change. That only affects yourself, but when your culpable muddle-headedness over money leads you to think that you had more than probably was there and you accuse me——"

Miss Todd was nearly in tears again. "Fanny, what can I say? I've told you how sorry I am. I've—I've *grovelled* to you, and done my utmost to assure you, to convince you that I never thought any such thing. Why won't you let it drop?"

"Because I'm too hurt, too cut to the heart to look at the matter as lightly as you do. I wish now I hadn't let you pay for my ticket and my lunch. It'll take nearly everything I've got"—Fanny was raking in an ostentatiously shabby handbag—"but I'd rather not be under any obligation to a person who can't trust me."

"Please, Fanny, that has nothing to do with this—this unpleasantness."

"Yes it has, Emily. If you hadn't spent money on the difference between the tickets and my lunch (please remember that I was perfectly willing to travel third and to go without lunch) you might not have thought there was more in your bag."

"I won't let you pay me back."

"You must."

Fanny, in slow, bitter words, added up her indebtedness to Miss Todd, and from a pathetically shabby purse produced the amount. She held it out. Miss Todd refused to take it. How could she allow Fanny to reduce herself to as little as she had said she possessed? Fanny retorted that that did not matter. She laid the money on Miss Todd's knee. Although a pauper, she had her pride.

"Fanny, you're my guest. Of course your railway ticket and your lunch are just part of my privileges as your hostess. Please don't hurt me by paying for them."

"I'd rather, Emily."

"No, Fanny."

For once Miss Todd showed herself firm, determined, resolved. It was Fanny who hesitated, wavered, finally capitulated. She took the money back and restored it to her purse, slowly, reluctantly, grudgingly.

"I feel most uncomfortable. It would be kinder of you to do as I say."

"Certainly not, Fanny. I utterly refuse to. Now, isn't that enough about this—this misunderstanding?"

"I have no wish to prolong such a profitless discussion. I did my utmost to discharge my obligations, but you wouldn't accept my offer to pay what you had spent, so——"

"I couldn't."

Fanny shook her head sadly. The gesture intimated that Miss Todd was unreasonable, patronizing, and Fanny only allowed her her own way out of pure good-heartedness. Miss Todd, feeling nearly exhausted, saw with mingled surprise and thankfulness that familiar landmarks were coming into view.

"Look, Fanny! There's Steeple Batnors. It's called that because the steeple of the church is supposed to be the tallest in six counties."

"How interesting, dear!"

"That means that we're nearly home."

"Your home," Fanny corrected gently.

"Well, of course, but I hope it will be yours for a while."

They smiled, Miss Todd entreatingly, Fanny forgivingly.

"Is there a station at Little Batnors?" Fanny inquired.

"Just a platform and a few sheds. The pony-cart will meet us, and it's a nice drive up to the house."

Miss Todd felt like a minor royalty on her home-coming. Mr. Stubbs, the old station-master, hastened forward to greet and welcome her as she and Fanny stepped down from the shabby local train into which they had changed at a junction for the last stage of the journey. Well, well, welcome home, Miss Emily.

"Thank you, Mr. Stubbs. I'm very glad to be back."

"And had you a pleasant holiday, ma'am?"

"Oh, yes, in a way, but I was ill most of the time."

"Dear! Dear! That was a pity, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but I found a friend who looked after me very kindly." She turned to Fanny. "This is Mr. Stubbs, Fanny, who's known me since I was a little girl. Miss Anderson is coming to stay with me, Mr. Stubbs."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am."

"Miss Todd has told me about you," Fanny explained graciously.

"And where's Miss Timmins, ma'am?" Mr. Stubbs asked.

A little chill seemed to fall across the scene. Miss Todd answered evasively: "She—she's not coming back."

"You don't say so, ma'am? Well, I'm sorry to hear that. Miss Timmins was with your Ma, and almost one of the family, I might say. No unpleasantness, I hope, Miss Emily?"

Fanny's cool tones cut in as Miss Todd hesitated.

"Timmins is going to be married, Mr. Stubbs. I'm looking after Miss Todd instead for the present."

"Well, wonders will never cease." Mr. Stubbs chuckled. "Miss Timmins married!"

"She's marrying the owner of the hotel where I stayed. He's a widower," Miss Todd murmured.

"Sounds very suitable, ma'am, but you'll miss her. And what'll Mr. Massey say?"

The question had been tormenting Miss Todd for days and weeks and, despite that humiliating unpleasantness with Fanny during the journey, throughout the last few hours particularly. What would Mr. Massey say?

"I don't know," she admitted helplessly.

Fanny spoke again, shooting a look at Mr. Stubbs, a look which, Miss Todd decided with surprise, was unfriendly, hostile. Perhaps Fanny thought Mr. Stubbs over-familiar, officious, but he had known Miss Todd's parents and, as she had explained to Fanny, Miss Todd herself since childhood, so this excused any seeming inquisitiveness.

"Don't you think, Emily dear, that you ought not to stand here any longer? The journey will have tired you, and I'm so anxious you shouldn't have a relapse. What about the luggage?"

"Jack has taken it out to the pony-cart, ma'am."

"Then we'd better come, hadn't we?"

Miss Todd, feeling rather nonplussed, allowed herself to be shepherded away by Fanny. Somehow their departure from the station was rather an anti-climax. As a rule, when she and Papa returned after any short expedition, Mr. Stubbs was encouraged to hear all about it, to show both how his garden was getting on, and to escort them outside to the waiting trap. Now Miss Todd was swept off under Fanny's authoritative guidance and barely given time to greet Smithson, waiting in charge of the vehicle. It bowed away up a wide, dusty road between hedges starred with wild roses. Fanny tucked the rug solicitously round Miss Todd.

"Not cold, dearest Emily?"

"Oh, no, thank you. It's such a lovely warm evening."

"It was too bad of that inquisitive old man to keep you standing. What business is it of his about Timmins?"

"Mr. Stubbs is an old friend, Fanny. He has known us all—and Timmins—for years. Of course he thought it strange that she wasn't with me."

Fanny said nothing.

The Croft was a large house, its rather uncompromising squareness of outline concealed by a heavy drapery of ivy and creeper. Miss Todd, accustomed to a lifetime spent there, took it for granted, but Fanny, she noticed, drew in her breath sharply at her first view of Miss Todd's home. The gardens certainly were at their best. Masses of rhododendrons made banks of colour. The trees—oak, beech, and chestnut—wore their summer livery. It was a little past the first flush of the laburnum and lilac, but the may had been late and was a defiant crimson glory. The rose-garden, at the back of the house, was not visible as the pony-cart drew up before the front door, but Miss Todd promised herself the pleasure of showing it to Fanny and witnessing her delight next morning.

"Welcome, Fanny," she said gently.

"Thank you, dear."

"Why, you look quite—awed." Miss Todd laughed. "Isn't it what you expected? I'm sure I've described it so often that you must have been bored."

At the time it had not struck her, but afterwards she remembered and realized with what probing, gentle persistence Fanny had questioned and cross-examined her about the Croft. Miss Todd had taken it all for sympathetic interest, the rather pitiful interest of a woman who had no house of her own, but she began later to wonder whether Fanny had not drawn from her every detail with a view to ascertaining exactly Miss Todd's social status and financial position. Obviously she had underestimated the latter.

"I could never be bored, dear Emily, hearing about your home." Fanny shook her head in gentle rebuke. "Only I hadn't realized that it was so grand, such an estate."

"Oh, no, Fanny. The house isn't really very large, though it may look so from the outside, and the gardens are quite small. Papa never bought any of the land. It belongs to the Cheesemans."

Fanny nodded. Smithson had descended and rung the bell. Mrs. Crabbie came to the door, and amid a little bustle of welcome Miss Todd led Fanny across the threshold. . . .

Does a prisoner's heart misgive him as he hears the prison gates clang to behind him, and a chill fear visit him when he wonders whether they will ever part to release him? Miss Todd pondered now why she had not realized then, as she did so clearly on this day of Fanny's funeral, that the hour when she admitted Fanny Anderson into her house set the seal on her freedom, personal, spiritual, financial. Fanny, by subtle, imperceptible stages, inch after inch, invaded the citadel, imprisoning Miss Todd as surely as any captive of old, acting as her jailor, her mentor, her captor. By the time she realized her servitude it was too late, her fetters riveted too firmly, Fanny's ascendancy over her too rigid, too immovable, too complete. Miss Todd might rage and weep for her folly, her consummate, irreparable folly, but it was years too late. . . .

"Good evening, Mrs. Crabbie. And how are you?"

"I am quite well, thank you, ma'am. I trust you are better? We were very upset when your letter came, saying you were laid up."

"Yes, it was unfortunate, wasn't it? But I am practically all right again."

"You look thinner, ma'am."

Miss Todd laughed. "Do I? Oh, well, home cookery will soon remedy that. I wrote that I was bringing a friend with me. I suppose her room and everything is ready."

"Of course, ma'am." Mrs. Crabbie coughed. "And I understand Timmins is getting married and will not be coming back."

"No." Timmins' prim ghost suddenly trod across the hall. "I'll tell you all about it another time, Mrs. Crabbie. Fanny?"

"Yes, dearest?"

"I want to introduce my housekeeper. You've heard me speak of Mrs. Crabbie?"

"Oh, yes, often."

Mrs. Crabbie smiled at the new-comer.

"Miss Emily told me in her letter how good you were to her, ma'am. I'm glad she had someone to look after her when she was all alone in a strange place."

"I loved doing anything I could. Emily dear, ought you to stand?"

"No. Perhaps we'd better go upstairs. Which room is Miss Anderson to have, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"I've put her in the green bedroom, ma'am."

Miss Todd was suddenly conscious of an irritating wish that she had issued more precise directions in her letter when she wrote to inform Mrs. Crabbie that she was bringing Fanny Anderson with her on her return. The green bedroom—the best of the spare rooms—was next door to her own. She did not want Fanny so near, especially at night. It might give her an excuse to invade Miss Todd's privacy—naturally from the kindest of motives, merely to see that she did not require anything—as she had done not infrequently at the Woolpack. Of course Miss Todd had really been ill, and Fanny's visits—it was unkind to style them incursions—were usually welcome, but here things would be different. She was practically recovered. Fanny was her guest, she Fanny's hostess. If she did need help of any kind the servants were available. From the first Fanny must feel that all she was required or obliged to do was simply to enjoy herself.

"What a beautiful old hall!" Fanny sighed rapturously.

Fanny had a knack of admiring Miss Todd's possessions, and the latter, not infrequently, made her a present of some object which aroused Fanny's wistful adulation. She could hardly give her the hall, but Miss Todd felt vaguely vexed. There was no need to comment and exclaim so openly.

"It's not old," she protested. "Being rather dark makes you think it is."

Fanny gave back a little deprecating smile. Certainly the finely-moulded doors, an oil painting or two, and the heavy oak table gave a generally dark effect, but she observed gently that it looked old to her, and dearest Emily must admit that it was beautiful. Dearest Emily shook her head.

"The Croft's not a show place, Fanny. It's only a comfortable, middle-class house. Isn't it, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"Well, it's nice, ma'am, and I'm sure Miss Anderson will agree when she's seen the rest of it. Such a spring-cleaning as we've had! You see, with the poor master a sad invalid so long, and not liking any disturbance, we couldn't do much—a room at a time—but with you away I said we'd just turn out every inch of the place, and not before it needed it."

"You must have worked hard. Everything smells so fresh. Mr. Massey was hinting at a lot of redecorating, so I suppose we must see about this now I'm home."

"That would be nice, ma'am. The bedrooms, anyway, want papering. But you'll be tired, and you and Miss Anderson will like to go upstairs. Dinner's at half-past seven, as usual."

"Thank you, Mrs. Crabbie. We had lunch and tea on the train, only we're both hungry—at least I am. Come along, Fanny."

She led the way up a wide staircase, carpeted in a sober deep blue. Fanny followed and Miss Todd showed her into the green bedroom. It looked over the rose-garden and towards a flat stretch of arable land beyond. Fanny was lyrical in her praise of everything: the bed, with its fat pillows and billowing eiderdown, the large old-fashioned mahogany furniture, the faded beauty of ancient rugs strewn the polished floor, the extras for a guest in the shape of the bedside lamp, the tin of biscuits, the books in

a little case on the small table within easy reach of the bed. Dear, dear Emily! Such a sweet room! Fanny could not fail to have happy dreams.

"I hope so. You must tell me if there's anything you want."

"Oh, there couldn't be. You've thought of every detail. Look at that writing-desk—paper, envelopes, postcards, sealing-wax, and a delicious chintz-bound blotter. And you've even provided stamps."

"Of course. It's nice to write letters upstairs, I always think, with nobody to chatter and distract one's thoughts, though I trust I shouldn't do that. Poor Papa always said it was the height of bad manners to talk when another person was trying to write."

"I haven't many people to write to, but I hope I should never disturb you when you were busy in that way. You've a large correspondence, I know."

Fanny sighed. Miss Todd bit her lip. She had seen a vision of Fanny cosily ensconced in the bedroom she had pronounced so delightful, occupied with epistolatory labours to friends and relations, whilst Miss Todd enjoyed a breathing space below stairs without Fanny. Unconsciously she frowned. It was tactless, unnecessary of Fanny to stress her solitary state like that. Every guest must know that her hostess preferred her to efface herself occasionally, and letter-writing offered an admirable excuse. A picture came to her of the little smoking-room at the Woolpack with its dilapidated equipment for correspondence: the shaky table, the much-used blotting-paper, the scant supply of stationery, the out-of-date calendar, the rusty, clogged nibs, the dirty ink. She had written her letters there with, she now realized, Fanny sitting by, ostensibly occupied reading a book, but ready to seize the envelopes directly they were addressed, stamped, and stuck down.

"I'll just run out with these, dear."

"Oh, no, don't trouble, thank you. I can put them in the box in the hall."

"You never know when it's cleared. Mrs. Roper's rather forgetful. Much better let me just pop round to the pillar, and they'll go out before six."

"Isn't it raining?"

"I don't mind in the least."

In the end, to save further argument, Miss Todd had surrendered her letters, but she did not know why she should have disliked Fanny Anderson seeing the names and addresses of her correspondents. It was not as though Fanny had ever questioned her as to the recipients of the letters. Miss Todd had no proof that Fanny even looked at the envelopes. . . .

She jerked her thoughts back from the Woolpack and answered Fanny's last remark.

"I haven't really. One or two friends like Mrs. Lawley, our former rector's widow, and Miss Cummings, my old governess, and my godmother, Miss Harrington. I've hardly any relations, not even cousins."

"What about Mr. Massey, dear?"

"Oh, I wrote to him when I was away, of course, but at home we meet fairly often. He has charge of my affairs, you know."

"I see."

Fanny said no more, but Miss Todd was again left wondering how she was to explain Fanny to Mr. Massey, to excuse herself in the matter of

Timmins, and to go into the question of her expenditure during her holiday. He might think that she ought not to have acted as Fanny's hostess for the last few weeks, but then Fanny had been so very, very kind.

"Mary will unpack for you and I'll look in just before half-past seven," she promised. "We'll both have a little rest before dinner, shall we?"

"You must, dear. In fact, wouldn't it be wiser to go straight to bed and have a light supper there? I'll carry up your tray if you like."

"Certainly not, thank you. And there's no need to treat myself as an invalid any longer."

"Of course, dearest Emily. I hope you didn't think me intrusive or interfering, but I'm only so anxious that you shouldn't overtax your strength. Your heart——"

"There's nothing wrong with my heart."

"No, no, only an illness of any kind means a strain on the heart, and quite often people may have some little heart-weakness without realizing it." Fanny nodded sagely.

Miss Todd felt suddenly chilled and slightly scared. Was heart disease hereditary? Mamma had suffered from it for years. Could she attribute her occasional breathlessness after climbing stairs or any unusual exertion to its fell clutch? Fanny seemed so positive that Miss Todd was suffering from her heart, ought to be suffering from her heart, that Miss Todd began to wonder dismally whether she were. . . .

"I always thought my heart was perfectly strong," she murmured.

"You can't tell." Fanny's voice was low, grieved. "I think you ought to be careful, Emily. Do have a rest, and take all day in bed to-morrow. You mustn't worry about me. I'm not here to be entertained. I can be perfectly happy with a book or rambling about these lovely grounds."

"I'm tired of bed. I had so much of it at Derriford," complained Miss Todd.

"Well, we needn't decide to-night, dear. Only do go and lie down now. Where is your room?"

"Just next door."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

"Why? You aren't nervous, surely, Fanny, in a strange house?"

"No—no! What an idea! I only meant that I should hear if you called me in the night and could go to you at once."

Miss Todd bit her lip. This was what she had visualized and dreaded. As firmly as she was able she thanked Fanny, but assured her that there was no idea of trespassing on her kindness as she had done at the Woolpack. The maids would look after her, or Mrs. Crabbie.

"Yes, Emily. I had no intention of doing anything for you that you would rather they did."

"I know. I'll never forget your kindness, but I don't expect my guests to act as my nurse."

"We'll hope you won't need any nursing."

"Of course I shan't."

Miss Todd spoke with smiling assurance, but her spirits were low. How horrible, how handicapping if what Fanny hinted as to the state of her heart were true! She foresaw a semi-invalid existence before her. And Fanny?

Fanny would take every advantage of it. She would haunt and pursue Miss Todd with rugs, shawls, smelling-salts, footstools, warnings, and advice. Never would she allow Miss Todd to forget that she had a weak heart, or a damaged heart, or, anyway, a heart which needed care and watching. The said heart would afford Fanny every opportunity never to leave Miss Todd. Even at nights, as Fanny had hinted, Miss Todd would not be free from her. Eventually she might even suggest that with her heart in such a state (by this time Miss Todd suspected herself as a victim of angina at least) she ought not to sleep alone. Her bedroom was large and airy. There was plenty of room for another bed. It was no deprivation to Fanny to give up her room in order to make certain that dearest Emily had somebody close at hand. A vision of Fanny sleeping in the other bed, the incessant presence of Fanny presiding even over her dreams, and Miss Todd felt that life would not be worth living. A weak heart—and Fanny. Always Fanny. . . .

Sharply Miss Todd jerked herself together. This was too ridiculous. Her recent illness had pulled her down, and at the moment she was still feeling the after-effects, and tired by her journey, in addition to that unpleasant scene with Fanny in the train, but there was nothing the matter with her. If there were, it would only be an excellent and ample excuse to curtail Fanny's visit. Should her heart require her to take care of herself a guest might lead to unwise exertion on the hostess's part. Fanny, approached tactfully, would surely see the advisability of cutting short her stay. Of course—Miss Todd bit her lip—she did not want Fanny to cut it short, particularly as she had no home and nowhere special to go when she left the Croft, but long visits were quite a thing of the past. Dear Papa used to talk about the days when a visitor came for at least six weeks, the reason alleged being that it was not worth while anybody coming from a distance for less. Of course Miss Todd had paid Fanny's railway fare, so she was not at any loss in that respect, but although no time-limit had been set Miss Todd implied and Fanny presumably understood that her visit was not a mere week-end one. Again Miss Todd bit her lip. In the first flush of gratitude and hospitality, she now realized, she had never mentioned any specific length for Fanny to stay. Fanny had neither ties, engagements, obligations, nor invitations elsewhere. She might think herself expected to remain more or less indefinitely.

No, no, no! Miss Todd was horrified when she realized that she was picturing Fanny as an incubus, an unwelcome guest, a millstone, a— a hanger-on. What a horrible word! Such a cruel, unsuitable term to apply to dear Fanny, the soul of kindness. Without her care, her nursing, Miss Todd might have died, particularly if she really had a weak heart. The reminder made her voice again warm and friendly when she spoke.

"You mustn't worry about me, Fanny. We're going to have a lovely time together—at least, just as nice as I can make it—and I'm sure I'm not going to fall ill and trespass on your kindness."

"No, dear."

"Now, we'll both rest and tidy ourselves for dinner." She glanced at her watch. "Twenty-five minutes to seven. That gives us nearly an hour. I'll knock on your door at twenty-five past, shall I?"

"Thank you, Emily."

"Papa was very particular about punctuality, and Mrs. Crabbie's the

same." Miss Todd laughed. "It's as much as my place is worth to be late for a meal."

"Isn't that rather tyrannical? Of course your father was quite right to insist on your being up to time, but Mrs. Crabbie——" Fanny twisted her mouth. "A servant, your housekeeper—— Surely, dearest Emily, you don't allow her to dictate to you about the hours when you have your meals?"

"She doesn't dictate." Miss Todd was flushed and stammering.

"Perhaps not in words, but—— I dare say she gives you cold soup or hard eggs by way of showing that she isn't pleased. Now, doesn't she?"

Miss Todd made no reply. She had grown so accustomed to Mrs. Crabbie's rule that it never occurred to her to resent certain manifestations of it—until Fanny put it into her head.

She ought to have had more sense. How could she allow Fanny to drive Mrs. Crabbie into giving notice? The housekeeper had seen through Fanny, and at the parting of the ways she had spoken plainly, warned Miss Todd. . . .

How had Fanny gained such an ascendancy? Miss Todd held all the cards. She had money. She was the one in possession. Yet Fanny, penniless, obscure, had taken possession of Miss Todd, her personality, her household, her life, and—Miss Todd saw it at last, naked, undraped—squeezed her dry. If Miss Todd had died first——

She hadn't. It was Fanny who had died, Fanny who was being buried, Fanny who at this exact, identical moment was a corpse under a coffin-lid on which the dry, powdery earth was pressing scornfully. Oh, bury her deep, deep, cried Miss Todd's heart. She mustn't come back. . . .

A brief rest on the sofa at the foot of her bed, a chat with Mary, the elderly housemaid, who brushed Miss Todd's hair and superintended her toilette for the evening, and Miss Todd felt braced and happier. It was undeniable that she missed Timmins, but Mary seemed efficient and capable. She must talk over with Mrs. Crabbie next morning the possibility of substituting Mary for Timmins and getting a younger woman as housemaid. Mary might like the position better.

Miss Todd tapped on Fanny's door. Fanny called to her to come in, but Miss Todd answered that she was waiting to escort her guest downstairs. Was Fanny ready?

"Yes, dear, quite."

Fanny emerged, wearing a simple frock of brown velvet. Rather shyly Miss Todd told her how nice she looked. "What a pretty dress, if you don't mind my remarking on it?"

"Of course I don't. It's only a cheap thing—the material, I mean. I ran it up myself."

"Fanny! How clever of you! It's beautifully made."

"A poor woman has to be her own dressmaker, Emily."

Fanny sighed gently and paced after Miss Todd.

The dining-room was large and lofty, presided over by family portraits. Miss Todd and Fanny faced one another across an expanse of mahogany and smooth linen. The windows looked out towards a portion of the garden, framing beds of brilliant, aggressive begonias, a trellis-arch crowned with

honeysuckle, and a row of giant sunflowers vying with the gold of the sunset. A bird called and called. Fanny sighed happily.

"Hungry?" Miss Todd asked mischievously.

"I believe I am. What lovely old wheelback chairs!"

"Is yours comfortable, or would you like a cushion?"

"Oh, no, dear, thank you. This leather's so soft."

Fanny jiggled gently up and down to show the resilience of the seat.

Dinner was simple, but dainty, and Fanny, at Miss Todd's pressing, made a good meal. It was she who insisted on Miss Todd drinking a glass of wine, and after some hesitation did the same herself. She was not accustomed to it, she explained frankly, but Emily ought to have a pick-me-up.

"But why, Fanny? I'm quite rested, or I shall be after a good night."

"Of course, dear, only coming home is tiring. So much emotion, and you have been ill."

Miss Todd was not conscious of having shown or felt emotion, but she did feel a faint irritation. Why need Fanny harp so persistently on her illness? It was not as though she had had a serious one, necessitating a doctor's attendance and professional advice? Her attack had been a mere chill, brought on by a thorough wetting, and she recovered from it rapidly and completely. She said as much with brevity, but also with decision.

"Yes, dear. How thankful I am! Had you been worse—— Pneumonia, now."

"Oh, I'd have had to go to a nursing-home."

"If we hadn't taken it in time that might have happened."

Fanny shook her head gravely. The action seemed to imply that although Miss Todd had escaped lightly for this once, on the next occasion she might not get off so easily.

"Grapes? Or would you rather have a peach or a slice of melon?"

"A few grapes, please. What beauties!"

"I expect Mr. Massey sent them." Miss Todd turned to the parlourmaid who was waiting. "Are these Mr. Massey's grapes, Rose?"

"Yes, ma'am. They came this morning."

"He grows them himself," Miss Todd told Fanny.

"Really, dear? How funny!"

"What's funny?"

"A lawyer growing grapes."

"It's just a hobby."

"But how can he? I thought you told me Market Batnors was a town."

"Mr. Massey doesn't live there. He has his office in Church Street, but his house is here."

"Oh, I see. How stupid of me! Do show it to me next time we are anywhere near, won't you?"

"I might have pointed it out when we were driving from the station, only it never occurred to me that you'd be interested."

"Anything that interests you interests me, dearest Emily. Isn't Mr. Massey a special friend?"

"He was of Papa's. And as my trustee—— Well, I'm afraid I give him a good deal of trouble, but I've no head for figures."

"You certainly haven't, or you wouldn't have made that dreadful mistake in the train."

Miss Todd flushed. She had supposed and hoped the incident over and done with, yet here was Fanny seemingly determined to drag it up again. Poor Fanny! Her feelings must indeed have been cruelly hurt by Miss Todd's stupidity and carelessness. How to assuage them and induce her to forget? Miss Todd's face brightened.

"We'll have coffee in the drawing-room, please, Rose. Will you come, Fanny? I must just run upstairs for one second."

She escorted her guest into the large lamp-lit drawing-room, with its sun-faded chintzes, its old miniatures and water-colours along the walls, its deep chairs and luxurious sofa, its long French windows. Fanny was persuaded to occupy a corner of a Chesterfield and Miss Todd tucked cushions behind her back. Then she disappeared, returning shortly afterwards with a pretty box in one hand.

"Fanny dear, you must let me give you this. I've been admiring your frock all dinner and it struck me that it would just complete it."

"Oh, Emily, how sweet of you! But I oughtn't to take a present when you're giving me my lovely holiday here. And my poor little frock will do as it is."

"Nonsense! Just try it on."

The gift was a long string of amber. Miss Todd slipped it round Fanny's neck and held up an old hand-mirror from an occasional table nearby that she might admire the effect. Fanny admitted that this was extremely charming, but——

"Now why 'but', Fanny? Aren't you pleased?"

"Of course I am. I'm delighted. Only—— Ought you to give me a valuable thing like this necklace?"

"It's not really valuable."

"Isn't it a family heirloom?"

"Good gracious, no! I quite forget where it came from, but I've had it ages and never worn it. Do keep it, Fanny, and wear it often."

"Dearest Emily!"

Fanny Anderson embraced her friend, murmuring thanks and appreciation. The necklace was lovely. It made her dress quite smart. Emily was so generous. Fanny would keep the gift always.

"I'm glad you like it. Here's coffee. Thank you, Rose. Black or white, dear?"

"White, please. Er—— Emily, ought you to take any?"

"Why not? It doesn't keep me awake."

"I was only thinking—— Your heart—— Coffee's a stimulant, you know."

Miss Todd half-regretted her impulsive generosity. She need not have given Fanny the necklace. Fanny had done nothing to deserve or require it. As she had pointed out, she was enjoying a holiday at Miss Todd's expense, and the necklace was superfluous. If she had not mentioned Miss Todd's heart Miss Todd would have been perfectly content for her to have the necklace, but Fanny had spoken tactlessly, and Miss Todd resented it. Still, she could hardly take the amber back, and probably Fanny meant to be kind and thoughtful.

"Coffee never hurts me. And Mrs. Crabbie makes it beautifully. A biscuit?"

"No, thank you."

Miss Todd and Fanny Anderson drank coffee out of Rockingham china in a rather constrained silence.

The evening was very quiet. A corncrake called harshly from a field. Miss Todd felt peace descend upon her. It was nice to be home. To-morrow she must have a comfortable talk with Mrs. Crabbie, explore the gardens, interview Grier, and no doubt Mr. Massey would ring up and suggest seeing her. He was a busy man, but he always seemed to have time to come to the Croft.

With a start Miss Todd suddenly recollected Fanny. Fanny was here, a guest, a visitor staying in the house, expecting, naturally, to be entertained, amused, taken about within the limited range of Little Batnors. Miss Todd could hardly include her in a confidential confabulation with Mrs. Crabbie, or an intimate financial discussion with Mr. Massey. Would Fanny efface herself tactfully?

"Don't sit up for politeness," she told her. "I mean, if you'd like to go to bed you'll say so, won't you, Fanny?"

"Of course—but I'm not a bit tired or sleepy."

"I thought perhaps the journey——"

Fanny's eyes opened widely.

"Oh, Emily, how stupid of me! *You're* tired, you poor thing. I ought to have remembered. Your illness, and then that stupid unpleasantness—— Why didn't you tell me you'd like to go to bed?"

This suggestion, just made to Fanny and now deftly applied to herself, rather took away Miss Todd's breath.

"But I don't. I'm not in the least tired."

"What time do you generally go?"

"Oh, about ten, as a rule, but I'm never in bed till a good while afterwards. I read a book, or Timmins used to brush my hair and talk to me."

"I dare say. Keeping you up, letting you take her quite out of her place, and her behaviour at the Woolpack just shows how she presumed on your good nature."

"Oh, no, Fanny. Timmins was always most respectful."

"She ought to have looked after your health better." Fanny set down her empty coffee-cup with a determined little clash. "I wasn't going to say anything at the time, because you were so weak and depressed, but I consider that Timmins was entirely responsible for your illness."

"Nonsense!"

"It is not nonsense. Didn't she let you get soaked one day you were out for a walk?"

Miss Todd laughed. The laugh had a shrill, uneasy note which rather startled her. "That's absurd, Fanny. Timmins couldn't help it raining. She was just as wet herself."

"Probably her clothes were more suitable for bad weather. In any case a great strapping woman of that class would take no harm. And did she make you change your shoes or get you a hot drink or do anything that might ward off a chill?"

"I forget. It all seems so long ago. And we weren't at the Woolpack then. It was at the Green Dragon, and you know how hotels hate anyone fussing. Timmins couldn't have got me a hot drink very easily."

"She didn't try to, it's my belief."

Miss Todd gave an exasperated little sigh.

"Fanny, there's no use in dragging it all up. Timmins is gone"—another sigh paid tribute to the departed maid—"and we needn't discuss her. I was quite satisfied with her and—and I wish she hadn't left me."

"Surely you wouldn't have stood in the way of her happiness, Emily? That isn't like you. You're so unselfish."

Fanny smiled deprecatingly at Miss Todd. Her hostess felt her colour rise. She raised her shoulders half impatiently.

"If I could be sure that she was happy. You said yourself——"

"Yes? What did I say?"

"Oh, well, you didn't seem certain that Mr. Bowles intended to marry her."

"You had only her own word for it. But if you weren't satisfied, why did you not tackle Mr. Bowles, find out from him exactly——"

"What his intentions were? Oh, I—I couldn't."

"Of course you couldn't. In a sense it was no concern of yours. And Timmins is old enough to manage her own affairs, I suppose."

"I don't know Timmins' exact age, Fanny. She was here a long time."

"Then that makes her ingratitude all the worse."

Feebly Miss Todd endeavoured to defend the maligned Timmins.

"She wasn't ungrateful. I've never said so. If—if she had an opportunity of marrying and—and liked Mr. Bowles sufficiently to accept him, she was perfectly right."

"I wonder if your Mr. Massey will think so."

The words, a mere silken murmur, pricked Miss Todd.

"I'm sure he will say I couldn't have done anything else."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yes. And—and even although he's my trustee, my man of business, he would never interfere or criticize my domestic arrangements."

Miss Todd felt rather proud of this last phrase. In a sense it embraced Fanny. If Mr. Massey objected to her inviting Fanny to the Croft——

"And you'll have to explain me," Fanny reminded her lugubriously.

"One doesn't 'explain' one's guests, dear. I shall tell Mr. Massey that we met at Derriford, and you looked after me most kindly when I was unfortunately laid up, and I asked you to stay with me."

"It sounds very nice when you put it that way, Emily."

"How else could I put it?"

"I don't know. But I'm rather frightened of your Mr. Massey."

"You needn't be. And please don't call him 'my' Mr. Massey. Ours is just a business relationship."

"I thought you were great friends, dearest Emily."

"He was Papa's friend and I've known him a good many years. Of course we are friends in that sense."

Unconsciously Miss Todd's tone was cold, aloof, holding off any further questions. She felt slightly exasperated. What was the matter with Fanny? Securely established at the Croft she did not seem nearly so nice as she had been at the Woolpack Inn. There Fanny glossed over the Timmins episode as much as possible, declaring that it was no use Miss Todd specu-

lating about Timmins' future or lamenting her departure, but here she seemed to want to discuss Timmins, to blame Miss Todd, to hint that she ought to have inquired further into the projected marriage. It was all annoying, irritating, and when Miss Todd's own conscience was not very clear on the score of Timmins she did not want Fanny to imply that she might have acted differently.

"Shall you get another maid?" Fanny asked suddenly.

"Not at present."

"Who is looking after you? I heard voices in your room before dinner."

"Oh, that was Mary. She's the housemaid."

"More 'maid' than 'house' I should say, dear. Your hair's beautifully done."

"Mary's quite clever at hairdressing. I think it might be a good idea to let her be my personal maid."

"And get another housemaid?"

"Mrs. Crabbie will have to advise me about that. It's her department."

"I suppose it is, but—— Oh, well, I hate interfering. Emily, only do decide for yourself. Of course Mrs. Crabbie will like having a younger maid who'd save her, and it would be much nicer for Mary, just waiting on you."

"I shan't give her very much to do."

"No. In a way Timmins was silly to throw up such an easy post. Now, if I——"

"If you——what?"

"If I could find a post like that. I mean, to be with somebody like you, Emily, not an invalid, just requiring care——"

"Fanny, you make me sound like a mild mental case." Miss Todd laughed uneasily. "I wonder you don't say 'supervision'."

"You know I didn't mean that. I was only thinking of your physical health."

"Which, very largely owing to you, dear Fanny, is quite good."

"Yes. I'm very glad. But you need looking after, Emily."

"I'm quite certain that I don't. I've never had anyone to look after me, and I'm not going to begin now."

Miss Todd felt surprisingly valiant. If Fanny thought she was able to persuade her to have a nurse she was mightily mistaken.

"You've had Mrs. Crabbie to shoulder all the domestic worries, and your lawyer man to look after your financial ones, and Timmins to see to your clothes and your hair, but none of them does or did exactly what I mean."

Fanny's tone was emphatic. She was sitting bolt upright, a spot of colour in either cheek. Miss Todd asked slowly:

"Do you mean a companion?"

"Yes, dearest."

"I don't think so, Fanny."

"Why not, Emily?"

"I should hate another person always with me."

"But she wouldn't be. It would be company for you on walks or in the evenings, and if you were ill——"

"Anybody would think you wanted me to be, the way you harp on it." Miss Todd spoke with a little spurt of temper.

"Emily!"

"I beg your pardon, Fanny, but really it sounded like it."

"Not at all. You're just like so many people who won't realize that they ought to be careful. Your heart——"

"It's quite sound."

"So you think, but I don't believe stairs are good for you. Now, if you want anything, a handkerchief, or a wrap, or your work-basket, I suppose you'd fetch it yourself instead of ringing the bell?"

"Of course. I'm not helpless, Fanny, and I don't like bringing Mrs. Crabbie or Mary up from the kitchen, and Rose and Taylor have their own work."

"Just as I thought. You run your own errands quite unnecessarily. When you came down after hunting for those beads you gave me I thought you were very exhausted, panting as if the stairs had been too much for you."

"The stairs are quite shallow."

"But when you run up and down——"

"Mrs. Crabbie or the maids wouldn't have known where the beads were."

"Just so. And you fatigue yourself with climbing stairs, stooping over drawers, rummaging in them, and running downstairs again just to bring me a present. I shouldn't have let you, Emily."

This was more like the old Fanny. Miss Todd drew a sharp breath of relief.

"You weren't consulted," she remarked lightly. "And I found the string quite easily."

"Still, it just shows—— Oh, what's the use of talking? Some people are very, very obstinate."

"I don't think I am, Fanny."

"Where your health is concerned you are."

"I did everything you suggested at the Woolpack. I'm sure I was a model patient."

"You were very good, but I didn't realize—— It hadn't occurred to me—— Oh, Emily, you must be careful. A faulty heart's not to be trifled with."

"Mine isn't faulty and I'm not trifling with it."

Would the polite duel, Fanny oddly watchful and persistent, Miss Todd determined not to be driven into a corner and talked over, ever finish?

"You don't think you are." Fanny swung one end of the amber chain gently to and fro. "That's the worst of any heart weakness. The patient doesn't know, or won't admit, that there's something not as it should be, and goes on trying to lead a normal life."

"And what happens?" Miss Todd's breath came hard.

"He or she may become a permanent invalid or die." Fanny's tones were hollow and foreboding. "Mrs. Bowles—Timmins' predecessor—didn't take care, so——"

"But I thought she died from something internal. I know she had several operations."

"Did Timmins tell you that?"

"Either she or Mrs. Roper. I really forget."

"Well, if it was Timmins she heard it from Mrs. Roper, and Mrs. Roper made it up and Timmins repeated it."

Fanny sounded quite heated and angry. Miss Todd gazed at her, aghast. What a pother about almost nothing!

"Does it matter?" she asked mildly.

"Yes. For one thing, you were given quite a wrong impression, and for another—I was only trying to show you, by a concrete example, that with a heart it doesn't do to over-exert oneself."

"I'm not over-exerting myself and it wouldn't matter if I did."

Miss Todd spoke firmly, her voice, to her own ears, sounding aggressively loud. This was terrible. If she took to shouting at Fanny—

"It would." Fanny snapped out the words. "That's what I'm trying to make you see, Emily, and you won't."

"What won't I see?"

"That there must be something the matter with your heart, or you wouldn't have been so breathless after hurrying up and down stairs."

"I don't think I was breathless."

"Oh, you were, dear. I could hear you, coming down, and crossing the hall. I was terribly distressed, but I didn't like to say anything as you seemed so annoyed with me upstairs for my friendly little hint."

Fanny arch was nearly as trying as Fanny injured or argumentative. Miss Todd sighed.

"It's very kind of you, Fanny, but really I don't think there's anything for you to worry about."

"But that's just it."

"I don't understand."

"You won't bring yourself to admit that there is anything."

"There's nothing."

Fanny shook her head. Her look, sorrowful, certain, seemed to intimate that her solicitude, her superior knowledge were powerless against Miss Todd's rock-like obstinacy, her mulish conviction that her heart was as sound as her investments, and consequently she, Fanny, could do nothing. She had delivered her soul, but on Miss Todd's own shoulders rested the responsibility. If she were disabled or dead it lay at her own door. . . .

(I'm not dead, ran Miss Todd's triumphant reflections. It's Fanny who is. At this moment I'm resting, in bed, but Fanny's lying on her back under the earth, six feet down, and they're piling sods over her. Aha!)

She never knew how much longer it might have gone on—Fanny's insinuations, her own objections and counter-arguments—but mercifully Rose came in.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Massey has just rung up."

"Oh! Is there a message, Rose?"

"Mr. Massey asked whether you were home, ma'am, and if you would speak to him."

"Of course. Please tell him to hold the line and I'll come. You'll excuse me, Fanny?"

"Certainly, dear. And, Emily, don't hurry."

In the doorway Miss Todd turned sharply as the words reached her.

"Do you mean I'm not to exert myself, or not to cut short my talk with Mr. Massey?"

"How you misunderstand me!" Fanny's look was troubled. "Where is the telephone?"

"In the library. That's at the back of the hall."

"Oh, then you won't have any stairs."

"Of course not. I must show you the library in the morning. Papa collected some rather good books, first editions, and so on."

"How nice! I'd love to see them. But you're keeping Mr. Massey, Emily, and I'm sure anyone like that is busy."

Miss Todd, feeling dimly that she had been ordered out of her own drawing-room, graciously accorded permission to hold a telephone conversation with her old friend because Fanny saw no reason for refusing to indulge her, went out. She walked rapidly. An imploring wail floated after her.

"Don't hurry, Emily. I mean, don't walk so fast. I can hear you puffing and panting, and you said it was on the level."

Miss Todd would have found immense relief in slamming the drawing-room door, but she managed to subdue her anger and tame her pace. She had shut the door quietly, and after entering the room she closed the library one, but more than once, during her talk with Mr. Massey, she thought that she heard sounds. Was that a door opening, the drawing-room door? Did her ears deceive her or had a footfall, stealthy, furtive, trodden across the dark flooring of the hall and halted outside the library? The maids would not eavesdrop. She could never credit Fanny with such meanness, such curiosity, such vulgarity. Absurd!

She lifted the receiver and called Hello. At the answer: "Is that Miss Emily?" her pulses quickened. After these weeks of strangers, how friendly, how homely, how cheering it was to hear an accustomed, familiar voice. She returned eagerly, breathlessly: "Yes. Yes. Good evening, Mr. Massey."

"Good evening."

"It's very nice of you to ring me up the first night I'm home."

"Not at all. I ascertained from Mrs. Crabbie that you were expected to-day, and your last letter to me mentioned Tuesday. I wanted to find out for myself how you were."

"Oh, I'm much better, thank you; in fact, practically well again."

"That's very satisfactory. Illness was an unfortunate complication, but you would have your excellent Timmins, and you said in your letters that you were well looked after."

"Yes. People have been most kind." Fanny's name trembled on her lips, but stuck in her throat. There was no necessity to mention Fanny so soon. She was not really important. A visitor, originally a chance acquaintance. Well, perhaps—Miss Todd's lips curved ruefully—that wasn't putting it quite kindly. She must never, never forget Fanny's goodness to her. Why, if it were not for Fanny and Fanny's care she might not be here, safely back in her own dear home, talking to her old friend and trustee. The realization made her voice warmer as she added: "I'm so glad to be back."

"That is good hearing. Your taste of travelling hasn't made you discontented with Little Batnors, then?"

"No, indeed. I was delighted to see it all again. I thought the place never looked so nice as this evening when we were driving from the station."

We! She and Fanny, of course, but Mr. Massey would naturally conclude that Miss Todd referred to herself and Timmins. She could not well explain just now. . . .

"Yes. This spell of fine weather has brought everything on. If it continues, we ought to have a splendid harvest."

"Yes, we ought. Mr. Massey?"

"Ma'am?"

She laughed and heard the echo of his answering laugh at the other end of the instrument. It was an old jest between them for Mr. Massey to call her this.

"I wondered— Are you very busy?"

"Not especially so. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Could you come over? A talk would be so nice."

"I should like to. Now, let me see— To-night you will be tired after your journey and so forth. Might I look in to-morrow, some time in the morning, shall we say, if that suits you?"

"Beautifully. Won't you stay to lunch? There's"—Miss Todd hesitated—"a good deal to talk over."

"Thank you. Lunch at one-thirty? That would suit me excellently. After the inner man is satisfied we can go into—er—facts and figures."

"Yes."

"Capital! Now, don't stand any longer, my dear Miss Emily. All being well, I'll come to-morrow and hear your news. I am very glad you're back."

"Thank you. Good night."

"Good night."

Miss Todd rang off and returned to the drawing-room. She felt ashamed of her suspicions when she entered and found Fanny established on the Chesterfield, precisely as Miss Todd had left her. It could not be Fanny who was eavesdropping—if anybody had been.

"There you are, dearest Emily."

"Yes. I'm sorry to desert you."

"My dear Emily, please don't think that you must always be with me, looking after me, like a prison wardress." Fanny laughed. "Do sit down. I suppose you've been standing at the telephone all this time?"

"It was only a few minutes." Miss Todd defended herself feebly.

"Well, I think Mr. Massey was rather inconsiderate."

"Now, why?"

"In the first place, to bother you the very first evening you got home."

"It wasn't bothering me. He—he wanted to know how I was."

"Couldn't he have asked Rose? I suppose, when she answered the 'phone, that she told him you were back?"

"Oh, yes; but he knew I'd like to have a word with him, so he asked her to tell me he'd rung up."

"I dare say. And when he knew that you'd been ill—seriously ill—he expected you to come to the telephone, even although you might have gone to bed or been lying down, and then he keeps you standing for quite five minutes. It may have been longer. I was nodding, so I didn't notice the time, but it seemed a good while."

Miss Todd sat aghast under Fanny's attack on poor Mr. Massey. How could she explain to her that she had expected him to ring up? He always did any time she or Papa had been away. And on this occasion, her first excursion out of Little Batnors after Papa's death, Mr. Massey had divined that the return without Papa, the coming into the house to find no Papa, had been trying, painful, difficult, particularly when she had not been well. Mr. Massey pictured her returned alone. He did not know that she had Fanny with her. He wanted to cheer her, his old friend's daughter, to let her feel that he was there, her friend too, anxious about her welfare, eager to see her again. It was all perfectly natural and laudable, but if explained to Fanny she would either not see it from Miss Todd's point of view or probably twist it to put Mr. Massey even further in the wrong. Miss Todd sighed.

"Poor Emily! You're tired out."

"No, indeed I'm not."

"You couldn't be anything else after the journey, and then that inconsiderate man ringing you up and keeping you standing."

"Mr. Massey's coming to lunch to-morrow. When you meet him I'm sure you won't think him inconsiderate."

"Well, I still feel that he might have left you in peace your very first evening. Did he invite himself?"

Miss Todd stared at Fanny.

"Certainly not. I asked him if he could come and see me, and when we arranged to-morrow morning naturally I suggested his staying to lunch."

"Oh, it's just a social visit then, dear, not a business call?"

"I suppose you might say it was both. After lunch we're going to have a talk."

"A talk! What about?"

Fanny had looked up alertly. Her tone was sharp and her eyes narrowed. Miss Todd experienced a growing sense of discomfiture. How unfortunate that Fanny was evidently prejudiced against Mr. Massey without even seeing him, and quite prepared to dislike him after she had!

Did that matter very much? But what if Mr. Massey disliked Fanny? He might even think that Miss Todd ought not to have invited her to the Croft?

"Oh, business." Her answer was vague. "He'll want to go into my expenditure when I was away, and things of that kind."

"But surely, dearest Emily, you haven't to account to him for every penny you spend? That would be too absurd."

"Not—not exactly." Miss Todd was confused and faltering. "But you see, Fanny, Mr. Massey has control of my affairs, and naturally he has to know what I've spent money on and—and how much I've spent. I haven't any head for business," she concluded miserably.

"So you said before, and it's quite evident that you have not. But I call it ridiculous for a woman of your age, nearly fifty"—in an expansive moment Miss Todd had once mentioned the number of her years to Fanny Anderson and regretted ever afterwards doing so—"should be obliged to have her money-affairs supervised by another person and her expenditure criticized as though she were a child."

"Papa left it like that."

"I've no doubt he meant well, but surely, Emily, you can see for yourself the unlimited power this gives Mr. Massey?"

"Does it?"

Fanny's small body gave an exasperated jerk.

"Of course it does. He can sell out your investments and put the money into anything that suits him, and in some cases a trustee manages to feather his own nest very adroitly. You ought to be careful."

"Mr. Massey would never do such a dreadful thing. Papa trusted him."

"Your father was old and had a long illness. Probably this Mr. Massey talked him over and persuaded him to leave your affairs utterly at his mercy."

"I—I don't think so. Mr. Massey's very clever with figures. Papa always consulted him about money and he never gained any advantage for himself."

"How do you know? You must forgive me for saying it, dearest Emily, but you've just admitted you haven't a very clear head where finance is concerned (that sad business in the train to-day is only one instance of it), and Mr. Massey can easily bewilder you with a mass of facts and figures and talk you into signing anything, agreeing to anything. Oh, I know."

Fanny nodded sagely. Miss Todd felt sick and puzzled and distressed. It was all true in a way, but she had never dreamed of doubting Mr. Massey, his integrity, his disinterestedness, until Fanny subtly insinuated the idea into her mind. What was she to do?

"You mustn't talk like that." The rebuke was feeble, ineffective. "Wait till you meet him."

"Does he know we're to meet?"

"I—I didn't say anything about you."

"Then he doesn't know I'm here?"

"No. Oh, I may have mentioned you in my letters to him, told him how very good you were to me when I was ill, but I never said you were coming home with me."

"I'm sorry you're ashamed of me, Emily."

"Fanny!"

"It looks like it. Otherwise why not tell Mr. Massey that you had a visitor?"

"I was only talking to him for quite a short time. I didn't even refer to Timmins having left me."

"You'll have to tell him to-morrow."

"Yes."

"He may say that he ought to have been consulted."

"I know."

"I hope he won't make himself unpleasant." Fanny shook her head. "I'll be there, though, and with a third person present he mayn't try to bully you."

Miss Todd was astonished at the white-hot indignation surging in her breast at Fanny's last suggestion.

"Bully me?" she repeated weakly.

"Yes. I can tell you're afraid of him, dearest Emily."

"But I'm not," Miss Todd protested. "That's quite a wrong idea, Fanny. We—we've never had a disagreeable word."

"Because you've always given in and let him think he's right every time."

"But he is right. A man knows so much more than a woman about money matters."

"Emily dear, what an old-fashioned idea!"

"I'm sorry, Fanny, but I suppose I am old-fashioned and it's rather late to try and change me."

"I don't want to change you. You're perfectly sweet as you are." Fanny rose and embraced Miss Todd. "There! Don't let's quarrel over a stupid man. I'll try to like your Mr. Massey, as you seem to think so much of him."

Miss Todd returned Fanny's kiss and sat down, feeling an immense, inexplicable fatigue overwhelm her. What had gone wrong? She had been so looking forward to seeing her old friend again, but now Fanny had poisoned the prospect, made Miss Todd feel a novice in business matters, a fool to be dependent on Mr. Massey's superior knowledge and abilities, and almost suspicious of his motives and acts on her behalf. The only hope was that when they were alone together things would be different. Ah, but would they be alone? Fanny had announced her intention of making a third party, and Mr. Massey's old-fashioned courtesy and Miss Todd's obsolete ideas as to a hostess's obligations might make it difficult to dislodge her. Fanny could be, on occasion, surprisingly tactless and obtuse. She knew that Mr. Massey was coming primarily as Miss Todd's trustee and man of business and surely ordinary politeness would induce her to leave the two together, or render it easy for Miss Todd after lunch to suggest an adjournment to the library for a talk with Mr. Massey? Would she remain, limpet-wise, and oblige Miss Todd to endure her presence whilst intimate details of finance and expenditure were gone into? Surely not, yet Miss Todd quailed before the possibility.

"I wish you'd trot off to bed, dear," Fanny told her.

"Shall we both go? I'm afraid you're tired."

"You certainly are. Well, I must say I'm ready."

Miss Todd glanced at the clock and saw to her surprise that it was only a quarter to ten. What an interminable evening this had seemed! Before her stretched an unending vista of similar evenings. Fanny on the Chesterfield, herself in an arm-chair, talking, talking, talking. To be accurate, Fanny would talk and Miss Todd answer. She would be questioned and advised and her actions and other people's, in so far as they affected her, be held up to ridicule, suspicion, and mistrust. It was too terrible. She must devise some form of entertainment. Papa had not cared for music, but she had played occasionally to him on the piano, and possibly Fanny might like to listen or to perform herself. Another night Miss Todd would offer her a book and determinedly take one up too. There must be avenues of escape. . . .

"Won't you have something hot?" she suggested. "Milk, or a glass of lemonade?"

"No, thank you. I wish you would, though. Hot milk might help you to sleep."

"I shall sleep like a top in my own bed."

"I only hope your heart won't keep you awake."

Miss Todd looked reproachfully at Fanny. Here she was referring again to Miss Todd's non-existent heart-trouble, quite prepared with warnings

and doleful prognostications. She must not be allowed to enlarge on the subject. It was ridiculous, embarrassing.

"Of course it won't. I haven't got one."

Miss Todd spoke brightly, determinedly, but Fanny only shook her head. As they crossed the hall together she held Miss Todd's arm, and in mounting the stairs insisted on her taking these very slowly. Outside Fanny's door they paused and Fanny inquired anxiously whether she could do anything for her friend.

"No, dear, thank you. Now, have you got all you want? Ring for Rose, if you haven't."

"Oh, I'm sure I have. It's you I'm anxious about. Dearest Emily, you will call or knock on the wall if you feel ill in the night?"

"If I do, and I don't think it's the least likely, I'll ring and one of the maids would come. I shouldn't dream of disturbing you."

Miss Todd nodded, released herself from Fanny, glanced into the latter's room to ascertain that all was in order; and after bidding her good night went to her own. Slowly she undressed, savouring the peace and bliss of being alone. Fanny was a quiet neighbour. Devoutly Miss Todd hoped that she would sleep and allow her hostess to do the same. To-morrow they might fit in better. This evening had not been a fair test. All the same, Fanny was trying, aggressive, tactless, positively rude about Mr. Massey, and far too inclined to make Miss Todd out mentally incapable and physically frail. It would not do.

Somewhat to her own surprise Miss Todd slept soundlessly and dreamlessly. She trusted that Fanny, on the other side of the wall dividing their two bedrooms, was doing the same. Previously she had mentioned nine o'clock as the breakfast hour, tacitly implying that Fanny and she would both breakfast downstairs, but as she sipped her early tea she wondered whether she should have suggested that Fanny might like to breakfast in bed. When the two friends met in the dining-room, into which the morning sunshine was flooding, she put the question with a shade of awkward diffidence.

"Fanny dear, it was so stupid of me, but I never thought of asking if you would rather have had your breakfast brought to you upstairs."

"Breakfast in bed? Oh, no, thank you, Emily. Unless I am really ill I much prefer to get up."

"So do I," Miss Todd agreed heartily.

"Ah, but in your case, dearest Emily——"

"What about my case? Will you have fish, or bacon and egg, or omelette? I think it's a mushroom one."

"Fish, please. I only meant that you might have been wiser not to come down to breakfast. I'd gladly have brought you a tray."

"That's very kind of you, Fanny, only there's no necessity. I'm like you. Unless I'm ill I like to get up."

"But you've been ill," Fanny stated baldly.

"That's a thing of the past."

"We'll hope so, but"—Fanny sighed and looked dubious—"you ought to be careful for a good while yet. An illness like yours often leaves nasty traces, some weakness or other."

"Well, I assure you that mine hasn't." Miss Todd was determined not to allow Fanny any loophole for referring to her heart.

"We must trust it has not. All the same, Emily, it's wiser to go slow and not over-exert yourself."

"I'm not proposing to do anything tremendously energetic."

"That's very sensible. Only the first day you're home to start entertaining——"

"Oh, I suppose you mean Mr. Massey coming to lunch?"

"Exactly."

"But that's not exerting myself, Fanny. An old friend like him! All I need do is to sit opposite to him at lunch and talk afterwards."

"A business talk's always tiring. You will have to keep your wits about you and be on the alert the whole time."

Miss Todd smiled good-humouredly.

"You told me yesterday that I'd no head for figures."

"Then it'll tire you all the more listening to Mr. Massey adding up and wanting to know how much this, that, and the other cost."

"I assure you it won't be like that. Mr. Massey has all the trouble. Do try some marmalade, Fanny. Mrs. Crabbie always makes it."

"It's delicious. Do you know what a fortunate woman you are, Emily?"

The question, accompanied by a reproachful look from Fanny, made Miss Todd feel vaguely uncomfortable. Perhaps she had taken her solid prosperity, her easy, unruffled life too much for granted. Fanny must feel the contrast with her own poverty and poor prospects. Never mind! Whilst she remained at the Croft Miss Todd would endeavour to do everything she could to make Fanny's stay a pleasant one, and after she left they must keep in touch. Oh, yes, certainly they must. Letters, an exchange of greetings at Christmas, perhaps a return visit, if this one were a success.

After Fanny left——

How long did Fanny propose to stay? Should she show no signs of departing in perhaps ten days or a fortnight's time (one could hardly expect her to go before that) had Miss Todd the courage, the boldness, the necessary firmness to terminate the visit? It was dawning on her, coldly, disagreeably, that Fanny, firmly established, might be difficult to uproot or to eject. Had her home duties claimed her, or she was due to return to a post after a well-deserved holiday, Miss Todd's path would be easier, but Fanny, apparently alone in the world, with no visible means of support, was more or less entrenched at the Croft. Miss Todd could not turn her out if she really had nowhere to go. Surely there must be links with her former life, friends or acquaintances on whom she had a greater claim than a mere stranger like Miss Todd whom chance had thrown across her path?

Miss Todd lent an inattentive ear to Fanny's conversation. She was back at her old trick of praising Miss Todd's possessions: the linen mats on the polished table, the cooking, the freesias in a deep bowl, the old china and silver. Underneath her praise, which sounded genuine enough, Miss Todd, alert to criticize, felt that she detected a note of pathetic envy, of subtle reproach that Miss Todd thought so little of her good fortune, taking it carelessly, as a matter of course. Perhaps Fanny found the contrast trying. Miss Todd would need to be additionally tactful and kind.

"Finished?" she asked cheerfully.

"Yes, dear, thank you."

"Shall we go into the morning-room, then? You may like to look at the paper."

"What do you take?"

"Oh, it's our local one, the *Mercury*. The *Times* doesn't come till twelve o'clock."

"I should like to see it. There might be something in the advertisements that would suit me."

Fanny's tone was wistful and resigned. She accompanied Miss Todd into a small pretty room off the drawing-room. Bowls of roses, cabinets full of old china, little low chintz-covered chairs, and sunshine on well-polished furniture made it very attractive. The whole elicited Fanny's glowing admiration. What a sweet, sweet room! "Is this your special sanctum, your boudoir, dearest Emily?"

"No. It's just the morning-room. I sit here a good deal now that I'm all alone. The drawing-room's too big for one person."

"This is charming. Oh, a spinning-wheel! How deliciously quaint!"

Miss Todd smiled and indicated the newspaper and some magazines lying on a small table.

"Well, I hope you'll use it a good deal. Can you amuse yourself whilst I interview Mrs. Crabbie?"

"Oh, certainly. Don't bother to entertain me, please."

"I warned you that staying here would be very dull."

They both laughed, Miss Todd apologetically, Fanny archly.

"It's not dull. It's so delightful, just the two of us. If you're arranging about meals, Emily, please don't have extras. I can eat anything."

"Oh, I don't starve my guests."

Fanny laughed again and Miss Todd withdrew.

She stood in the hall, half ashamed of her feeling of relief at being alone. She must make the housekeeping an excuse not to return to Fanny for a little while. How should the morning be spent? With his old-fashioned courtesy Mr. Massey was certain to arrive punctually for luncheon at half-past one, and it was now only ten o'clock. Perhaps Fanny might like to explore the gardens, or take a walk? She seemed to have few resources within herself. Now that she remembered, Miss Todd had never seen her sewing or writing letters at the Woolpack, and if she read it was as a mere means of passing the time. It might be very difficult to amuse her in this quiet place. She would claim and encroach upon Miss Todd's leisure, and conversation with Fanny, Miss Todd was learning with rueful realization, meant a great many questions on Fanny's part and her own reluctant or evasive answers. It seemed incredible that within such a short number of weeks Fanny had gained this ascendancy over her. She appeared to think—Miss Todd's cheeks flushed—that she had a perfect right to ask Miss Todd about her private affairs, her money matters and her friends, and that Miss Todd ought to give her the fullest information concerning these. Not only this, though. Fanny apparently felt herself entitled to criticize, to warn, to pick holes in Miss Todd's methods, to sneer subtly at her stupidity over finance, and to curb her activities in every way. No; really that was too much. Miss Todd must take counsel with Mr. Massey, and no doubt, clever, far-seeing as he was, he would assist her to get rid of Fanny politely before it was too late.

A chill little thought visited her. Was it already too late? Fanny was

behaving as though she were closely related to Miss Todd and intended to remain indefinitely under her roof. That hint about looking for a situation was only an excuse to give Miss Todd the opportunity to beg her not to hurry away. Miss Todd remembered that she had said nothing and Fanny had looked disappointed.

With an effort she banished Fanny from her mind and went down to the kitchen. Mrs. Crabbie welcomed her and opened a discussion about meals. She heard with pleasure that Mr. Massey was expected to lunch.

"That's very nice, ma'am. Now, what about artichoke soup? Mr. Massey always likes it."

"Yes, I think that would make a good beginning."

"And fish-balls?" Miss Todd nodded approval.

"Fish-balls, followed by saddle of mutton, ma'am?"

"Oh, yes. And a pudding?"

"You gave Mr. Massey caramel cream the last time he lunched here, ma'am, and Rose said he seemed to enjoy it."

"Caramel cream by all means, Mrs. Crabbie."

"And fruit salad, ma'am? I've a nice cauliflower to go with the mutton, and Grier sent in a bundle of asparagus a few minutes ago. I might do the potatoes with butter sauce. And would you like cheese straws?"

"I think that would be lovely."

Miss Todd's mouth twisted wryly as she realized that Mrs. Crabbie had artfully planned and suggested the entire menu whilst she had merely acquiesced and approved. How Fanny would have resented this! Gravely she would point out that Miss Todd ought to have her own ideas ready, give her orders, tell Mrs. Crabbie definitely and decidedly what her wishes were. Miss Todd's brow clouded. She hated housekeeping, having in truth no more head for it than she had for figures. All the years of Mrs. Crabbie's reign she had played a subordinate rôle, allowing Mrs. Crabbie absolute freedom in her department. She made a pretence of consulting her mistress, but in reality ordered pretty much what she chose. Papa settled the bills. Mrs. Crabbie saved all trouble by rendering a monthly statement of expenditure which was paid by cheque. With horror Miss Todd reflected how deeply Fanny would disapprove of such a system. The only way to escape her criticisms and reproaches was for her to obtain no inkling of it. Surely, during her visit, she need not even enter the kitchen premises?

"Is that all, ma'am?" Mrs. Crabbie inquired.

"I think so. Just give us what you like for dinner."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Miss Anderson's a very easy guest. She was delighted with the fish soufflé last night."

"I'm very glad, ma'am." Mrs. Crabbie coughed slightly and hesitated. "I was surprised when I had your letter saying Timmins had left. Is Miss Anderson taking her place, may I ask?"

The idea, presented thus bluntly, flabbergasted Miss Todd. "Oh, no. She—she's my guest," she stammered.

"I see, ma'am." The tone told nothing.

"I was going to talk to you about Timmins, Mrs. Crabbie. Do you think it might be a good arrangement if Mary acted as my personal maid in future and you got another housemaid?"

"A younger one, ma'am?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, ma'am, if you consider Mary capable of doing all you require I don't see anything against it."

"I'll talk to her, then. And will you advertise or look out for a new housemaid?"

"Yes, ma'am. Is she to get the same wage as Mary has had?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I'd better talk it over with Mr. Massey and let you know. He might think with poor Papa gone and only myself we didn't need so many servants. Let me see: Mary and Rose and Taylor and of course yourself."

"It's a good-sized house, ma'am. You could hardly run it with a smaller staff."

"No, and there's no reason why we should. You'd better offer a new maid what Mary had, Mrs. Crabbie, and I'll give her more. There'll be sewing, you know, and little jobs that Timmins did."

"Yes, ma'am. I hope you won't miss her."

Miss Todd's face puckered. She had difficulty in keeping back tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie, it's been dreadful. I never thought she'd desert me like that."

"It was all getting a chance of marrying, I expect, ma'am. Women of any age lose their heads directly they see a husband on the horizon."

"I—I hope it'll be all right, that he'll really marry her."

"Isn't she married, ma'am?"

"No. At least—— I don't know. She said she was engaged and gave me notice, but I thought—I expected she'd take it back, only Miss Anderson—— I mean, she went away, and I—I never saw her again."

"That was very bad, ma'am, and you ill."

Miss Todd said hastily: "Miss Anderson looked after me."

"Yes, ma'am." Again Mrs. Crabbie's wooden expression and flat tone told nothing. "Am I to understand that Miss Anderson advised you not to bother your head about Timmins, just to let her go, in short?"

Miss Todd stammered and floundered in a bog of lame explanations.

"In—in a way. She thought Timmins was neglecting me and—and said so to her, and—and Timmins didn't like it."

"Well, ma'am, naturally. What business was it of Miss Anderson's?"

"Oh, she only meant to be kind."

"Interfering in another person's affairs isn't kindness, ma'am."

Miss Todd maintained a rather helpless silence.

"And you've brought her back with you, ma'am, after she meddled like that and lost you Timmins, a good servant, and your own Mamma's maid before you?"

"I—— I—— You don't understand. Timmins would have left in any case. Mr. Bowles—he owned the little hotel where we were staying—wanted to marry her. I couldn't have stood in her way. And, besides, she was a perfectly free agent."

"That's all true, ma'am, but it's not like Timmins to give notice and take herself off after all the years she was here; and it's not like you, Miss Emily, ma'am, to let her go and not trouble whether she's married or whether she isn't."

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie!"

"I'm taking a liberty in speaking to you like this, ma'am, and I hope you'll forgive it, but I can't make head or tail of this business." Mrs. Crabbie repeated helplessly: "It's not like either of you. And if Timmins is married and got nothing to be ashamed of, why hasn't she written to me? We were old friends."

"I—I don't know."

"It's my firm belief, ma'am, that that Miss Anderson's at the bottom of it. I'd like to know who she is. Did you just come across her at that hotel and let her get in with you and leech on after she'd ousted Timmins?"

How horrible Fanny's behaviour sounded, viewed in this light, put in these words! Miss Todd quivered. Was Mrs. Crabbie right? Oh, she couldn't be. She made Fanny out a kind of adventuress, roaming about, fastening on Miss Todd because she saw that she was a wealthy fool, unprotected save by a maid. Had Fanny engineered the whole thing, deliberately angered Timmins to the point of goading her into giving Miss Todd notice, and then deftly insinuated herself into Timmins' vacant place and shoes? No, no, no!

Feebly Miss Todd struggled to maintain her dignity. After all, as Mrs. Crabbie said, she had taken a liberty in speaking thus of her mistress and her mistress's guest. It must be stopped.

"Miss Anderson was exceedingly good to me." Her voice sounded cold, rebuking. "I was really very unwell, and she did everything, went my messages, nursed me, kept me company. As to who she is——" Miss Todd's wrath mounted. "Her father was a clergyman. She's an orphan, and was stopping at the hotel at the same time that I was. She thought I was not fit to travel alone after my illness, so she suggested seeing me home and I invited her to stay with me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I don't know what I'd have done without her. I couldn't have managed by myself when Timmins left me."

"Mr. Massey won't be pleased about Timmins, ma'am."

Poor Miss Todd began to realize that her foes were indeed those of her own household. Before the interview with Mrs. Crabbie, usually such a pleasant opening to the day and which she had looked forward to during her absence, a vague, barely formulated idea was hovering on the outskirts of her mind. Perhaps Mrs. Crabbie, somewhat set in her ways, disliking any upheaval or alteration in her even and comfortable routine, might object to the presence of Fanny Anderson. If Mrs. Crabbie resented visitors staying at the Croft how much easier it would be to hint to Fanny that her departure was desired. Of course—Miss Todd's mind argued and floundered—Fanny might not require any hint. After a reasonable time, a fortnight or ten days, she would almost certainly suggest leaving. In that case, instead of pressing her to remain, Miss Todd could mention that the servants were the difficulty in the way of her doing so. Surely Fanny would understand, acquiesce, agree, and go. Go where? The chill reminder struck at Miss Todd like a blow. Fanny was in the house, more or less established, and possibly might consider herself entitled to remain indefinitely.

If Mrs. Crabbie supported her and wished Fanny's removal Miss Todd might stand up to the ensuing, inevitable unpleasantness better, but Mrs.

Crabbie, instead of taking this line, seemed more inclined to enlarge on the departure of Timmins, and to blame Miss Todd for her handling of the affair. Mrs. Crabbie ought not to do so. Surely she must see that Timmins was a free agent and Miss Todd had no power to compel her to withdraw her notice? As for blaming Fanny—— That was absurd. Fanny, a complete stranger, had proved herself exceedingly kind and competent, whereas Timmins had basely deserted her mistress during the throes of illness in a strange place. The attitude Mrs. Crabbie had assumed towards Fanny—— critical, suspicious, doubtful——made Miss Todd resentful, anxious to range herself on the side of poor maligned Fanny. What business of Mrs. Crabbie's were Fanny's antecedents? Her employer vouched for her guest, and it was really presuming on her years of service, her long connection with the family, for Mrs. Crabbie to hint that Miss Todd had been overreached by Fanny and thoroughly taken in. This was what it amounted to. Miss Todd's mild anger heightened. She was tired of being treated like a child. Fanny was perfectly right when she implied that people bullied her. Now Mrs. Crabbie was taking a most unreasonable, undesirable attitude towards Fanny. It was a little too much if she, Emily Todd, the mistress of the house, the owner of the Croft, could not feel at liberty to invite a guest, another woman, not a man who would require waiting on, or a young girl expecting entertainment, but a contemporary, middle-aged, unassuming, unexacting, quiet. Fanny had been asked to stay with Miss Todd, and if Mrs. Crabbie did not like it she could give up her situation as Timmins had done. It might be difficult to replace her, but if she were going to forget her station, think herself at liberty to criticize and disapprove of her mistress's actions, then they had better part.

Could she do nothing right? Timmins had chosen to go. It was unfair, unjust to blame her, Emily, for not persuading the maid to remain. Probably Mr. Massey would think as Mrs. Crabbie did, and poor Miss Todd could never justify herself. Suddenly she felt a gush of gratitude, of renewed friendship towards Fanny. Fanny had never tried to induce her to keep Timmins against her will and interests. It was Fanny, clear-sighted, much more experienced, who pointed out the extent and enormity of Timmins' base ingratitude and stressed how much wiser it was to part with her. Fanny had been perfectly right. Timmins wished to go, regardless of the inconvenient position in which she placed Miss Todd. Then why should Miss Todd have lowered her dignity to plead with Timmins to remain and instituted inquiries into Timmins' matrimonial prospects which were no business of hers? Throughout the affair, with its embarrassments and humiliations, Fanny had stood by Miss Todd, and she was not going to have Mrs. Crabbie insinuating that Fanny had acted from interested motives all along.

In a cold voice she said stiffly: "I don't think we need discuss it any further, Mrs. Crabbie. Will you see about another maid in Mary's place, that is, if she's willing to make the change?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I think that's everything—about meals, I mean. You can order what's wanted from the Stores, and I'll talk to Mr. Massey about settling the accounts at the end of the month."

"Very good, ma'am."

Miss Todd, feeling slighted, snubbed, and small, withdrew from the

kitchen. It was her own kitchen, she reminded herself, but she usually felt an interloper invading Mrs. Crabbie's domain. How disagreeable Mrs. Crabbie had been this morning! Possibly, during Miss Todd's absence, she had grown accustomed to an easy life and fallen into slack ways. A hint about reducing the staff was obviously unwelcome. If she were going to be lazy, impertinent, resentful of any alteration or innovation, life did not promise smoothness. Might it be as well to dismiss her and install a new housekeeper?

The prospect staggered Miss Todd. She decided to consult Mr. Massey. Surely he must take her part and see how unreasonable and unpleasant Mrs. Crabbie was about Timmins' departure? What would Fanny think? If Miss Todd were plunged into a domestic upheaval caused by Mrs. Crabbie following Timmins' example and leaving perhaps Fanny might consider her own presence superfluous and troublesome and suggest going away? Miss Todd was ashamed of the feeling of relief induced by this possibility.

Fanny was reading the local paper when Miss Todd reappeared in the morning-room. She glanced up, smiled, and laid aside the sheets.

"Do come and sit down, dearest Emily. You look quite flushed and upset. I—I hope nothing unpleasant has happened?"

"No. Not exactly unpleasant, but——"

"Put your feet up on the sofa and tell me all about it. Yes, dear, I insist. You are absolutely exhausted, I can see, and with a visitor coming to lunch and business matters to go into you will want all your energies."

Miss Todd sank into a corner of the sofa. Fanny rose determinedly, lifted her friend's feet, and covered them with a gay rug. There! wasn't that nice and comfortable? It reminded Fanny of their happy time at the Woolpack when Miss Todd was first well enough to get up and Fanny had to be very, very careful of her Emily. She tucked silk pillows behind Miss Todd's neck and back and then settled herself on a little chair beside the sofa. Was was wrong? Had somebody been unkind? Emily had better not keep it to herself. Two heads were wiser than one. Fanny would be only too glad, too proud to help by advice or action. She waited expectantly.

Faintly Miss Todd said: "It was Mrs. Crabbie."

"Your nice housekeeper?"

"I thought she was nice." Miss Todd sniffed, a sound charged with resentment. "Now I'm not so sure."

"But what did she do or say, dearest?"

"Oh, it was about Timmins. At first everything was quite pleasant and just as usual. We discussed what we'd have for lunch, and any suggestions she made were very nice and suitable, all dishes that Mr. Massey likes, and I agreed, and then she began about Timmins."

"What impertinence!"

"Oh, she didn't mean to be impertinent, I'm sure. She's been here so long."

"Too long, I should say, if she feels that it entitles her to criticize you."

"It wasn't exactly criticism. Of course she wanted to know why Timmins had left and why I let her go without finding out whether she really was going to be married, and she——and she——"

"Yes, dear?"

"She seemed to blame you."

Miss Todd's voice sank to a shocked whisper. Fanny sat very erect.

"Blame me? But why? What for? What did she think I had had to do with it?"

"I—I don't know. Oh, it was just an idea of hers, I suppose. I tried to make her see how good you'd been to me, nursing me and not letting me miss Timmins, but she wondered if you—if you had made mischief."

Miss Todd's shaking accents died to a faint murmur. The room was suddenly steeped in an appalling quiet, like the hush before a gathering storm broke. In the field beyond the garden a reaping-machine sounded harshly.

"Emily!"

"Yes, yes, dear?"

"I never heard anything so—so insulting."

"I'm terribly sorry, Fanny."

"You ought to be. Your housekeeper, a paid dependant, takes it upon herself to criticize your handling of the departure of your maid, who gave you notice, mind, and was not dismissed by you."

"Y-yes, I suppose that was how Mrs. Crabbie behaved."

"You oughtn't to put up with such insolence. As for myself——"

Miss Todd, prone on the sofa, lay rigid with apprehension.

"Of course I must overlook it. I'm not in any position to retaliate, but to be accused of interfering, parting you and Timmins, and I suppose feathering my own nest——"

"Oh, Fanny, please, please don't say that. It's not true."

"I know it's not, but isn't it what your housekeeper thinks and what she said?"

"Mrs. Crabbie didn't understand. I explained as well as I could. I told her that I had been ill and you did everything instead of Timmins, and I was very grateful. Oh, please, Fanny, don't be angry."

"I have every right to be, Emily."

Miss Todd sought feebly to recover dignity and poise.

"If it isn't true, Fanny, and you and I know that it isn't, why should you mind what other people imagine?"

"It's outrageous. We met at the hotel and I think you liked me. I was only too glad to do a little for you, nursing and shopping, but I never dreamed of having my actions misconstrued, my motives misinterpreted, and my kindness viewed in the light of self-seeking and underhand attempts to turn things to my own advantage."

Fanny's voice was high, indignant, reproachful. Miss Todd felt overwhelmed, aghast, acutely miserable. What could she do to right matters?

"Nobody thought that," she bleated feebly.

"Your Mrs. Crabbie does. Of course she'll tell the other servants, and it will get round to your precious Mr. Massey, and he will say that I'm quite unsuitable to stay here as your guest. You'd better count the spoons in case I steal them."

"Fanny, don't. Don't, Fanny. It's horrible to hear you hint at such dreadful things. Mr. Massey would never gossip with servants."

"Yours seem privileged. I've no doubt Mrs. Crabbie will make an opportunity to warn him against me and implore you to get rid of me."

Miss Todd could only shed tears and ejaculate her friend's name in various keys of reproach, appeal, and dismay.

"It's no use your saying 'Fanny! Fanny! Fanny!' like that, Emily. I've been so grossly insulted that I'd leave immediately—this afternoon, no, this very morning—only that it would simply be playing into that horrible woman's hands. She wants me to go. I can see that plainly."

"Oh, Fanny, no. Mrs. Crabbie never said anything of the kind."

"Then why did she try to prejudice you against me?"

"I—I don't think she did."

"Of course she did. Her motive in daring to talk to you like that is as plain as the nose on my face."

Miss Todd wept hysterically.

"It's very hard. I tried to be kind, Emily. You were a stranger in a strange place, and ill, and I was truly sorry, and did my best to help, but to be accused of having done it all from the most sordid motives——"

"Oh, Fanny, don't talk like that. Who's accused you? Mrs. Crabbie didn't really mean what you imagine. She just wondered——"

"How you picked me up, and who I was, and what I was trying to get out of you. Don't trouble to explain away her insinuations and inquiries, please. I know exactly what's in her mind. You were a poor unsuspecting, forlorn thing, and when Timmins left I persuaded you not to try to keep her, and to let me look after you. I suppose Mrs. Crabbie thinks you paid me. You didn't. You know you didn't. I haven't taken a penny. You paid for my railway ticket and my lunch, and I shouldn't be surprised if you told her that I stole money from your purse in the train, but you know it's not true. I've not benefited by a farthing since I met you. It's too horrible that people should have the idea that I'm making money out of you."

Miss Todd bowed before the storm. She let Fanny talk on and on. Fanny's voice was not raised unduly. She did not rave or rage or rant or scream. In firm, controlled accents, a note of most bitter reproach underlying her calm, she pointed out to Miss Todd exactly what Miss Todd's housekeeper, a woman with a low, cruel, foul, suspicious, evil mind thought and believed and supposed and felt about Miss Todd's friend and guest. It was no use Emily trying to argue, to explain it away. Fanny had been grievously misunderstood and unpardonably insulted. Only that it would gratify Mrs. Crabbie immensely to realize that her unkindness had driven Fanny from the Croft, nothing would induce Fanny to stop an hour longer under Miss Todd's roof.

"Oh, Fanny, you won't go, will you?"

"If I stay, Emily, it's simply in order that your housekeeper shan't have the pleasure of boasting that she found me out and I ran away."

"It's all dreadful. I never thought you'd think she meant to—to insult you. I'm sure she didn't, Fanny."

"My dear Emily, please don't try to defend her and put me in the wrong. I consider that her conduct was disgraceful, presuming in the first instance to criticize her employer's guest, and by the most underhand means endeavouring to oust her."

"Mrs. Crabbie was speaking in confidence, Fanny. She never meant me to repeat anything she may have said."

"You were perfectly right to tell me of her odious suspicions and insinua-

tions. Now that I know where I am, and how your household regards me, I can be on the look-out and defend myself."

Fanny relapsed into an injured silence. Miss Todd dried her eyes and sat up feebly.

"Oh, dear! It's all too hateful for words. Need we say any more about it?"

"I certainly don't wish to discuss it further. Only that it would be making entirely too much of it I should insist on your housekeeper apologizing, but I prefer to ignore her behaviour completely."

"Yes, Fanny."

The room was steeped in silence, broken only by a stifled sigh from Miss Todd. Suddenly Fanny sprang up.

"Oh, *Emily!*"

"Yes? Yes, dearest Fanny?"

"How dreadfully selfish and thoughtless of me to expose you to this! I ought to have smothered my own feelings, overlooked these humiliations and base, underhand methods of trying to part us, and remembered you, Emily, your health, your poor, poor heart——"

Fanny paused dramatically. She was standing beside Miss Todd's couch. As Miss Todd looked up apprehensively Fanny flung herself on her knees by the sofa and clasped Miss Todd's hands.

"Dearest Emily, how could I? Oh, do forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive." Miss Todd spoke faintly, closing her eyes. "At least, I haven't anything. You ought to forgive me, Fanny."

"Why? You've done nothing. It was all other people like that wicked housekeeper of yours." Fanny gulped. "Such a scene, and entirely owing to her. It's been enough to kill you."

"I hate scenes," moaned Miss Todd.

"So do I. Do lie back and—and compose yourself. Emily?"

Fanny's accents were soft, insinuating, beguiling. Miss Todd began to feel a horrid suspicion stealing over her. Fanny was about to propose something—something against her wishes, her principles, her conscience. She knew it well from the tone of Fanny's voice. After such a shattering scene Miss Todd felt physically and morally incapable of withstanding her.

"What is it?" she asked weakly.

"I think you ought to have a glass of wine."

"But it's only half-past ten. Papa didn't approve of drinking anything like that between meals. Besides, I don't want it."

"You may not want it, but you require it." Fanny's tones were firm. "I'm the best judge of what's necessary for your health. You've had a shock, and I presume you wish to be quite bright and ready for Mr. Massey when he comes."

"Oh, yes. I told him I was practically well again, and I don't like to think of his finding me like this."

"Exactly. Now, do do as I suggest, dearest Emily. Let me ring for the wine, and you'll sip it and have a nice little rest, and then you said something about showing me the gardens, didn't you?"

"Yes. I want to see how things have come on when I was away."

"That would be delightful, only first—— You know I hate giving orders in another person's house, but please let me just ask for the wine for you."

"Ring, if you like." Miss Todd spoke almost inaudibly. Why did not Fanny get up and return to her own chair instead of leaning over Miss Todd, breathing earnestly, and intensifying the feelings of suffocation, of bewilderment, of utter helplessness which threatened to swamp her?

Fanny rang the bell. She did it decidedly, as though she were prepared to stand no nonsense and expected an immediate response. After an interval Taylor, Mary's colleague and contemporary, the other housemaid, appeared. She looked surprised and a trifle flustered. No wonder, reflected Miss Todd's bewildered brain, as she had seldom, if ever, rung the morning-room bell, or any other bell, at such an hour.

"Yes, ma'am?" Taylor inquired.

"I—I——" stammered Miss Todd.

"You rang, ma'am?" Taylor reminded her assistingly.

"Oh, yes. At least—— Miss Anderson rang."

"Yes, ma'am?" Taylor glanced interrogatively at Fanny.

"Miss Todd is not feeling well." Fanny spoke coolly, authoritatively, as though, Miss Todd reflected dazedly, she were the mistress of the house. "Please bring some wine for her. Emily dear, what do you like? Port? Burgundy? Sherry? Brandy?"

"Oh, not brandy, Fanny, please."

"Port, then?"

"Port," Miss Todd agreed faintly.

"Bring some port, please, and a wine-glass." Fanny addressed Taylor.

"Yes, miss."

Miss Todd roused herself feebly as Taylor was leaving the room.

"Two wine-glasses, please, Taylor. You must have some, Fanny."

"Oh, no, dearest. You know that I'm practically an abstainer, and in any case I don't require it just now. It's you—your heart——"

"My heart's all right."

"I'm sure I hope so, but you look ghastly. Doesn't she look ill, Taylor? It's too bad if you have a relapse, Emily, after making such a good recovery."

"I think she's all right, miss." Taylor spoke stiffly.

"Of course I am." Miss Todd smiled weakly. "You might bring some biscuits too, Taylor. At least you'll keep me company with a biscuit, Fanny?"

Fanny demurred. She did not feel hungry so soon after her excellent breakfast *and* early tea. Such a luxury! She wasn't accustomed to these indulgences. Dearest Emily must not spoil her, or she would find it harder than ever to go out into the cold world.

That maligned organ, Miss Todd's heart, gave a leap of thankfulness. Fanny was going, then? She did not purpose to remain indefinitely? How wonderful! How reviving! With the prospect of her departure a certainty Miss Todd felt that she could endure the rest of Fanny's stay, although she trusted sincerely that there were not going to be any more scenes like the one she had just passed through. They were too ageing, too nerve-racking, too exhausting. Fanny, on the contrary, seemed to find them revitalizing, if not actually enjoyable. Miss Todd shut her eyes again. . . .

"Thank you, Taylor." The maid had come in with a little tray containing a decanter, two wine-glasses, and a plate of biscuits. "Now, Emily dearest. Can you sit up and sip this?"

Fanny had filled the glass to the brim. Miss Todd shook her head

weakly as she raised herself on one elbow and took the slender stem. "I don't really want all this, Fanny," she murmured.

"Nonsense! That tiny little glass! Get it down, there's a dear. May I take a biscuit?"

"Of course. Where's your own glass?"

"I'd rather not, Emily, thank you. I'm not accustomed to wine."

"Well, neither am I, but you"—bullied me, was on the tip of Miss Todd's tongue, only she realized in time that this might not sound very polite and hurriedly substituted instead—"persuaded me into drinking it."

"You wanted a stimulant after being so upset."

"I'm sure you do too. Just to please me, Fanny."

"Well, half a glass, then, but it's simply to please you, Emily."

"Isn't that a very good motive?"

The wine, mellow, rich, warming, slipping down Miss Todd's throat, gave her an astonishing amount of strength and renewed courage. She nibbled a biscuit and smiled at Fanny. Fanny, still protesting politely, had taken up the decanter.

"You pour it out for me," she suggested prettily.

Miss Todd filled Fanny Anderson's glass.

"Oh, Emily!"

"What, dear?"

"I told you I'd only take half a glass."

"But they're such small glasses. You said so yourself. It's not worth while drinking half, about one mouthful. You can quite well manage a whole glass."

"Do finish your own, dearest, instead of waiting on me."

Miss Todd obeyed. The wine was certainly very good. Papa had procured it through the advice and offices of Mr. Massey. She must tell him at lunch how enjoyable it had been. No; on second thoughts perhaps it would be wiser not to mention that Fanny had suggested that she should drink port in the middle of the morning and that Miss Todd had basely succumbed to the tempter. Mr. Massey might not approve. He was old-fashioned and himself drank very little except an occasional glass of claret. Papa would never have permitted spirits to be offered to guests. At lunch there would be home-made lemonade and cider.

These were rather inflating and comfortless. Miss Todd tilted her glass to extract the last ruby drops. . . .

"Do take another," Fanny purred.

"No, certainly not. One's ample."

"I'd feel happier, Emily, if you had just a little more."

"I won't unless you will."

"But I'm not tired and you are."

"Lunch won't be for three hours. You're sure to feel hungry before then. Just another glass, and one more biscuit."

"It's only to keep you company."

Miss Todd and Fanny Anderson both had a second glass of port.

It was surprising what a difference this little indulgence made. Miss Todd felt rejuvenated, valiant, ready to face anybody and anything. If she had been thus fortified the interview with Mrs. Crabbie might have turned out very differently. She said something of the kind and Fanny nodded agreement.

"Don't you think, dearest Emily, that for a few weeks at any rate, until your health is quite re-established, it might be advisable to take a glass of wine every morning about this time?"

"Oh, I don't know, Fanny. I don't really require it. It's not as though a doctor had ordered it."

"I'm sure any doctor would approve of it. Why not try, and as soon as you feel you don't need it you can leave it off?"

"So I could, but I'm not sure that it's a wise thing to start a bad habit."

"A bad habit!" Fanny appealed to gods and men. "You make it sound as though I were encouraging you to be a secret drinker, dearest Emily."

Miss Todd thought the idea really amusing and laughed heartily. Fanny laughed too. She drew a most entertaining picture of herself and Miss Todd carrying bottles of brandy up to bed, secreting port in odd corners, hiding burgundy under the sofa cushions, having illicit draughts of sherry at regular intervals. When they were both at the end of their mirth Fanny referred again to the matter which had occasioned it.

"Why not try whether a glass like this each morning benefits you? I won't ask you to keep on with it if you dislike it, but just at first——"

"I don't dislike it. I think it's very nice."

"Well, then, do give orders to Taylor to bring it to you daily. I won't have any, of course, and she'll not be able to look disapproving."

"It's no business of Taylor's."

"I know, dearest, but you do rather allow your servants to ride roughshod over you, don't you? For instance, that horrid Mrs. Crabbie—— Oh, but we're not going to talk about her, are we? It's all quite, quite forgotten, at least by me." Fanny flowed on vivaciously. "No; Taylor shan't have any occasion to criticize your guests. Just tell her that you're going to take a glass of port every morning for health reasons and she's to bring it to you for the present."

Miss Todd, despite the temporary courage imparted by two glasses of the fluid under discussion, began to feel the old helplessness creeping over her.

"You never suggested my drinking wine at the Woolpack, Fanny."

"What kind of stuff would they have produced? Probably it would have been quite undrinkable, and they'd have charged extortionate prices besides. And you didn't require it then."

"I don't believe I do now."

"I think you do, dearest. Please be guided by me. You want to keep up your strength, and it'll be just a little stimulant between breakfast and lunch."

"I could have coffee or hot milk or a cup of one of those patent foods if I really needed anything. I'm not accustomed to eating between meals."

"You hadn't been ill. This is all a question of health. And coffee or a patent food or hot milk would all require preparation, and you'd feel it was giving trouble in the kitchen if you ordered any of these. Now, wouldn't you?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Of course you would. You're far too self-effacing and considerate."

You never seem to realize that your staff of servants is paid to do what you require, not to save themselves trouble and let you put up with anything."

"Oh, they don't. I don't. I'm sure when I was away Mrs. Crabbie and the maids worked splendidly. You heard her say yesterday, after we arrived, that they had been spring-cleaning, and certainly the whole house looks spotless."

"So it ought to, run by four able-bodied women—five, before Timmins left—and only one lady, as the advertisements say."

"I don't like being a nuisance, Fanny."

"Bringing you a glass of wine every morning can hardly be called that. Now, do be sensible, dearest Emily, and ring for Taylor and let her take away these glasses and give her your orders about your pick-me-up to-morrow."

"And yours."

"You know that I'd much sooner not. It isn't as though I required it like you."

"Just to please me."

"Well, perhaps to-morrow, but it's not to be a regular thing—for me I mean. Shall I ring, and then you needn't get up?"

"Oh, thank you."

Taylor appeared. She looked rather sulky, Miss Todd decided, and further irritated her employer by looking at Fanny for instructions instead of Miss Todd.

"Yes, miss?"

"Miss Todd rang for you, Taylor." Fanny strolled to the window, ostentatiously disassociating herself from the conversation between mistress and maid.

"You might take the tray away, please, Taylor." Miss Todd spoke faintly, apologetically.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And—and to-morrow morning—— That is—— I thought—— I want you—— Miss Anderson suggested——"

Taylor directed a baleful glance towards Fanny's back. Oh, dear! reflected Miss Todd, I hope they aren't going to dislike her. First Timmins, then Mrs. Crabbie, now Taylor. . . .

"Yes, ma'am?" Taylor repeated.

"She—she thinks as I've been ill, you know, that I ought to drink a glass of port every morning about this time."

"Yes, ma'am."

"So will you please bring it?"

"Certainly, ma'am."

"I—I suppose there's plenty in the cellar?"

"I believe so, ma'am."

"I—I want her to keep me company. That'll be two glasses."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then that's all. Do you think eleven is too near lunch to have it, Fanny?"

"It's for you to decide, Emily."

"We'll say a quarter to eleven then, shall we?"

"Just as you like."

"A quarter to eleven, Taylor, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

With deliberate slowness Taylor collected the decanter, the two wine-glasses, the little fluted plates containing biscuits, the tray, piled with the whole, and walked out. Miss Todd began a helpless spate of speech.

"Oh, dear! I'm sure she disapproves. She didn't say anything, but her manner—— She mustn't get the idea that I'm—I'm indulging in spirits. Oh, dear! dear! What had I better do?"

"You can't do anything." Fanny's tone was almost openly contemptuous. "The idea of caring what Taylor thinks! Pray, is it any business of hers?"

"N-no, I suppose not."

"Of course it isn't. You do worry so, dearest, about those wretched maids of yours. You were quite inclined to fret yourself to fiddlestrings over Timmins—tiresome, ungrateful woman!—and now it's Mrs. Crabbie and Taylor. Try to realize that you are a free agent, and if they don't do as you wish they can leave."

Miss Todd stared at Fanny in horror.

"Leave? Mrs. Crabbie? Taylor? I could never get anyone like them."

"You could easily. A choice place of this kind—— There'd be queues after it. Don't worry your head about that, my dear."

Fanny was laughing. Her attitude drew a reluctant smile from Miss Todd. How sensible Fanny was! After all, in the kitchen Miss Todd had herself toyed with the idea of letting Mrs. Crabbie go. She hoped that it might not come to this, but if it did Fanny seemed to think that Mrs. Crabbie, Timmins, Taylor, the entire staff, in fact, would be only too easy to replace. A chill vision of servants selected by Fanny personally paraded before Miss Todd, to be chased sternly away. Idiotic! Ridiculous! Fanny was just a guest, a mere bird-of-passage, someone with no stake in the house, no reason to interfere with Miss Todd's domestic arrangements and problems. Miss Todd might consult her should it come to a crisis, but that was entirely different. Why worry any further? Taylor had received her orders, which were, as Fanny so truly and wisely pointed out, as far as the matter went, all that concerned her. She was not paid to criticize, to wonder, to object, or disapprove.

"Well, I hope it will be all right." Miss Todd's tone was dubious. "And now, Fanny, what about a turn in the gardens?"

"I'd love that, if it isn't too tiring for you."

Miss Todd protested that it was not, but despite the administration of two glasses of port she felt astonishingly feeble as she rose to her feet. If the first morning of Fanny's stay had produced two scenes, both of which left her completely shattered in body and nerve, what might not eventuate during the remaining days? She strove to thrust the prospect from her as she went upstairs to put on her hat and outdoor shoes. Perhaps the fresh air would act as a restorative.

The gardens were at their summer best. The early sun had scarcely dried the dew still gemming the grass of lawn and paddock. Flowers were everywhere: roses, many-coloured, breathing their sweetness into the warm atmosphere, red-hot poker, lupins, iris, peonies, Canterbury bells, masses of azaleas and delphiniums, Shirley poppies, and antirrhinums. Miss Todd

led her friend along paths bordered by box and through blistered doors set in sun-baked walls. Fanny exclaimed and admired and was prettily appreciative. Dear Emily! What a delightful setting for her all this was, so right, somehow. The sky spread very blue above the mellowed red of brickwork, and the old trees cast a deep shade across the lawns. At one point Miss Todd proposed that she and Fanny should sit down for a little while on a weather-stained teak garden-seat, but Fanny was dubious as to the wisdom of the idea.

"I'm so afraid you might take cold, dearest."

"Oh, Fanny, how could I? The sun's almost too hot."

"I know, dear, but that's just the way a chill's caught. I don't want you to have another illness like the one at Derriford."

"You always said that was because I got my feet wet."

"I know, dear, I know, only it's wiser not to run any risk. An illness, however slight, leaves one so susceptible to a fresh attack."

"I'm sure it wouldn't hurt me."

"No, Emily. I'd feel responsible, as though it had been my fault, if you took cold."

Miss Todd felt irritated and rebellious. It was all very well for Fanny to be watchful (some people would have called it fussy) when she was first convalescent after a sharp bout of illness, but if, during her stay, Fanny intended to pursue Miss Todd with warnings, advice, blunt refusals every time she suggested doing anything ordinary, life would simply not be worth living. For a few delicious seconds her mind toyed with the idea of falling ill again, nothing serious, merely some ailment sufficient to necessitate her remaining in her room or retiring to bed, but—— She dismissed the alluring vision sternly. Alas! that would not save her from Fanny—Fanny's incursions into the fastnesses of Miss Todd's retreat, Fanny's renewed exercise of determined authority, Fanny's opportunities for ingratiating and establishing herself still further with Miss Todd. Mrs. Crabbie, Mary, and Taylor would all be out-generalled, out-manœuvred by Fanny. She would take possession of Miss Todd, nurse her, cosset her, keep her an invalid indefinitely, and by the time Miss Todd had recovered sufficiently to do without her Fanny would be so rooted and settled that Miss Todd might find it impossible to dislodge her. No. As long as Fanny was her guest Miss Todd must keep on her feet. She checked a sigh. Fanny's determinedly bright prattle, Fanny's arch and incessant questions, Fanny's company were already wearing her down. She felt tired, limp, physically and mentally exhausted. How much longer had she to escort Fanny round the premises? Surely Fanny must see that for the present they had had enough of one another's company?

"Shall we leave the hot-houses for another day?" she suggested feebly.

"Just as you like, dearest. I'm not a bit tired, but you mustn't do too much."

"Well, we might perhaps look into this one and then go back to the house, if you don't mind."

Fanny was all effusion and acquiescence. Miss Todd unlocked the door and led the way into the steamy, humid, sweet, half-suffocating atmosphere of the greenhouse. Grapes and peaches were ripening gradually. Tomatoes reddened on trays, and there were some rare plants. Grier, then a man of about forty, came forward, touching his forehead.

"Good morning, Grier."

"Good morning, ma'am. Glad to see you back."

"Thank you. It's nice to be home. I've brought my friend, Miss Anderson, to see the gardens, and we're just taking a peep, but we won't disturb you."

"That's all right, ma'am."

Miss Todd and Fanny strolled through the hot-house. Fanny's murmured admiration was like a bee humming. Grier displayed his grapes eagerly. They ought to be just ready for the show. "The Croft grapes always take first prize, ma'am," he told Fanny proudly.

"I'm sure they deserve it. What beauties! When is the show?"

"August, ma'am."

"Oh, I'll be gone long before then. Never mind! You must write and tell me all about it, dearest Emily."

Fanny was going. She had no intention of remaining. This was only the beginning of July, and if she referred to leaving long before an event which was an annual happening in August she must have made her plans for departing within a short time. Miss Todd felt inhospitable and unkind for not instantly protesting and declaring that Fanny must extend her visit to embrace the flower-show, but she dared not. She was beginning to know Fanny. Fanny would protest in her turn, declare in her turn that she could not think of encroaching too much on dearest Emily's hospitality, but she would seize the opportunity—and stop. Once the flower-show was over she might find another pretext for prolonging her stay, and after that another and yet another, until she never went. Oh, heavens! Fanny always at the Croft!

Thirty years. Thirty years of bondage, bullying, and Fanny. Miss Todd could not realize that they were over. It made them no less bitter in retrospect to reflect that she had only herself to thank for them. She ought to have seen through Fanny, seen Fanny through other people's eyes, and sent her away. . . .

Would Fanny have gone? All these years Miss Todd had never found the necessary courage to dismiss her. Fanny made no move to depart on her own account, and the mere prospect of the scene she would make, the reproaches she would heap on Miss Todd's unlucky head, and the determined stand she would take up prevented Miss Todd from ever summoning sufficient firmness to tell her that she must leave. One unpleasantness—and a lifetime's peace. One act of decision—and her house and her days freed from Fanny. She was a fool, she knew, but—she couldn't. Fanny in a rage, Fanny implacable, incensed, outraged, offended, infallibly placing Miss Todd entirely in the wrong, was so terrible that the bleak alternative of Fanny's continued presence seemed easier to endure.

Thirty years! She could feel the hot, damp air of the greenhouse on her face and sniff the mingled scents. They had gone out, she and Fanny, Fanny smiling at Grier, no doubt thinking that she had impressed him favourably. At first she had. Later he hated her, and Fanny seldom ceased to importune Miss Todd to dismiss him. Here, at least, the poor woman reflected, she had stood firm. Why, she argued, should she dismiss Grier? He was a valued, faithful servant. When he grew too old and inefficient for work in garden or greenhouse she gave him charge of the lodge and the little plot of ground behind it. There he planted what he pleased and with her

permission and authority sold the produce for his own benefit. Fanny hotly resented this. She and Grier quarrelled continually over the matter, Miss Todd usually an unhappy, embarrassed spectator and witness. Grier's hearing was failing, and although he had little difficulty in understanding what Miss Todd said to him he became practically stone-deaf to Fanny's raised, heated accents. Why, only the morning of the day Fanny became ill she had had a scene with Grier. Miss Todd, her mind otherwise occupied, could not make out much, but it seemed to be all about some cucumbers. Fanny maintained, as she had always done, that Grier cheated over vegetables. Emily ought to see into it. Miss Todd retorted that it did not matter. She had told Grier to do as he liked with his own growing. If she chose to buy vegetables from him what concern was it of anybody's? She was quite sure that Grier never cheated her. Fanny's voice seemed to ring in her ears now.

"You're always so foolish about money, Emily. It's just asking to be cheated the way you behave. It's my belief that Grier buys vegetables elsewhere, the market-garden, probably, and charges you twice as much after pretending that they were his own produce."

"Grier wouldn't do that, Fanny. Because you don't like him doesn't necessarily mean that he's dishonest."

"I'm certain he is."

Miss Todd shivered as she recalled that conversation with Fanny and the circumstances which preceded and followed it. That evening Fanny was taken ill, three days later she died, and now Grier had opened the gate to let the hearse with the coffin go through. Fanny had probably counted on seeing Grier's modest funeral leave the lodge, but Fate had turned the tables surprisingly. It was Grier who had watched Fanny's departure for good.

Miss Todd began to shiver again.

She was not imaginative, but the look on Grier's face as he surveyed Fanny each time she came to the lodge and began investigating the garden and the tool-shed and the little kitchen when she and Miss Todd were inside the house was not pleasant. It had always been the same. From the start Fanny mistrusted Grier. The very first morning of her visit, the moment she and Miss Todd left the greenhouse, she had begun an argument fated to grow sickeningly familiar. . . .

"What magnificent grapes, Emily! I'm sure they'll be as fine as the ones you said Mr. Massey had sent. You know? We had them at dinner last night."

"Yes. I'm glad Mr. Massey doesn't send his in for the flower-show. Ours would have no chance."

"Ours?" Fanny laughed.

"Grier's and mine. I say 'ours' because they're really more his."

"And what becomes of them? I mean, you can't eat all that, can you? I saw peaches as well, and I suppose in time there'll be strawberries and soft fruit?"

"Oh, yes."

Would Fanny be gone before the strawberries were ripe?

"You haven't told me what becomes of everything?" Fanny was gently, pitilessly persistent.

"Oh, I don't know."

"You don't know? Oh, Emily!"

"I think the surplus goes to the cottage hospital. Of course we use a good deal in the house."

"We? You and the maids?"

"I suppose so. I'm fond of fruit."

"And I expect they are too."

Miss Todd laughed awkwardly.

"Why shouldn't they be? It's very wholesome."

"I was only thinking——"

"Thinking what?"

"That it sounds rather a wasteful method of managing."

"I've never tried any other."

"I think you ought to. When there's too much of a thing it's a temptation to—to misuse it."

"It's not wasted. As I said, the hospital gets a lot—fruit and vegetables—and I suppose the rest is used by Mrs. Crabbie."

"And your gardener—Grier?"

"I don't understand, Fanny."

Her voice sounded cold. Fanny responded instantly.

"Dearest Emily, you know I wouldn't interfere for the world. It's only just struck me that that man has great opportunities for cheating, speculation, selling garden and hot-house produce behind your back."

"I'm sure—I'm sure Grier would never be so dishonest."

"Have you any way of proving that he isn't?"

Miss Todd remained silent.

"Does he keep a record of what's grown, anything you can check?"

"N-no. There's no necessity to."

"I think there is, Emily. Certainly there should be. It's quite likely that he and Mrs. Crabbie are in league together."

"You say that because you don't like Mrs. Crabbie."

"Would anybody like a person who had insulted them and tried to drive them away?"

Miss Todd looked appealingly at her friend.

"I thought we weren't going to say anything more about that, Fanny."

"I don't want to. It was you who reminded me of the way she's behaved."

Fanny then, as always, secured the last word.

Miss Todd sighed. "Well, never mind Mrs. Crabbie. Shall we go back to the house?"

"Certainly."

They walked back, Miss Todd firing off short, nervous sentences to which Fanny responded by brief monosyllables. As the cool shadows of the house gathered both into its embrace Miss Todd glanced surreptitiously at her watch. Only half-past eleven! Would the morning never end? She and Fanny had been strolling about the gardens for less than an hour, yet the time seemed more like four. If it were to drag in this fashion, every conversation with Fanny degenerating into argument, culminating in what almost amounted to a quarrel, death loomed as the sole form of release. Why was Fanny like this? What a dreadful, an appalling, outrageous, incredible idea she had insinuated into Miss Todd's mind with regard to

ier. Ought Mr. Massey to be consulted? How could she, his employer, after all these years institute inquiries as to what became of the garden produce? This would be tantamount to accusing Grier of peculation, embezzlement, dishonesty, in short, all the dark deeds with which Fanny had credited him. Miss Todd could not, no, really, she could not. It might involve Mrs. Crabbie, especially if it got to her ears that Fanny suspected Grier's integrity. After all—Miss Todd's horizon brightened again—what did it matter how, precisely, the garden vegetables and the hot-house and outdoor fruit were utilized? As she had told Fanny, the cottage hospital received a generous share. Papa had arranged this and Miss Todd intended to keep up the custom. For the rest— Well, she and the servants ate fruit and vegetables every day, and this must use up practically all there was. If a certain amount remained over Grier was perfectly right to dispose of it, even to his own advantage. How could Miss Todd stand over him, counting Brussels sprouts and broad beans, portioning out pears, probably upsetting Grier and in the end driving him away? Fanny, if no further reference were made to the matter, would probably forget all about it.

She asked rather helplessly: "What would you like to do?"

"Anything you wish, dearest Emily."

"Well"—Miss Todd bit her lip—"can you find a book or something to read? I have to write a letter, and then we'd better get ready for lunch."

"Yes, dear. Only don't tire yourself. You look quite white. I do hope I haven't been dragging you round the gardens in the sun and fagging you out."

"Oh, no," Miss Todd protested faintly.

"You oughtn't to bother about letter-writing." Fanny opened the morning-room door and peeped in. "Look! the blinds are half down and everything's deliciously cool. Why not have a little rest, Emily, on the sofa, with your feet up?"

"I'm—I'm not accustomed to lying down in the daytime, Fanny, especially in the mornings. Papa would have thought it very self-indulgent and lazy."

"It's neither. Your father was old-fashioned and sounds rather Spartan. You forget that you've been ill, and for a while it's as well to take precautions. Your letter isn't very important, is it?"

"No. Only to Mrs. Lawley, to tell her I'm home again."

"That can quite well wait, or"—Fanny clapped her hands softly—"I'll do secretary and write to your dictation."

"It's very good of you, Fanny, but I can manage to write myself quite easily. It would be better, I think. Mrs. Lawley's old, and if she saw that somebody else had written for me she might worry and think I was ill."

"Doesn't she know about your illness when you were away?"

"Yes, but I told her I'd quite recovered. I don't want her imagining I've had a relapse or something."

"You're very likely to unless you go slowly. Now do be sensible, Emily. I see paper and ink and everything in that charming little desk—Sheraton, isn't it?—and you can just tell me what you want to say."

"I'd much rather write myself, Fanny. It needn't be more than a few lines."

"Then your friend would wonder why you only sent her a short letter. If you dictate it you can say everything you want."

Fanny was gracefully determined, Miss Todd fatigued and disinclined for argument, particularly as she knew that she would only be defeated by Fanny in the end. She gave way reluctantly. Fanny established her on the sofa, seated herself at Miss Todd's desk, added the date to a sheet of note-paper stamped with the address, and waited.

"I'm ready, dearest Emily."

Suddenly Miss Todd felt extraordinarily, overwhelmingly weary.

"I don't think we'll bother, Fanny, thank you. I haven't two ideas." She laughed feebly. "After all, there's no hurry. This evening or to-morrow will do quite well."

Fanny's face expressed dissent.

"You'd better let me write, dear, and I'll explain that you are too tired to do it yourself. If we leave it now you'll only worry about it this evening, and I don't suppose after having a visitor to lunch that you'll feel any fresher or more inclined to tackle correspondence."

"There's really no hurry."

"Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day." Fanny nodded sagely. "I'll explain to Mrs. Lawley that I'm staying here and offered to write for you as you were feeling the after-effects of your journey and having been ill—I'm sure she'll understand."

Miss Todd closed her eyes. What was the use of objecting to Fanny's acting as her secretary? For the nonce it did not matter. A warning voice whispered to her that this might not be the only occasion that Fanny became amanuensis. If once she gained control over Miss Todd's correspondence the next thing would be her accounts, her expenditure, her personal extravagances. Physically tired out, Miss Todd, whilst realizing this, felt unable to curb Fanny's helpful interference. She reminded herself that of course Fanny meant well. . . .

Fanny's pen slipped easily over the paper. Miss Todd dozed. When she roused with a start Fanny was beside her, holding out the sheet.

"I don't want to see it, Fanny. I'm sure it's all right."

"I'd much rather you looked over it, dearest Emily."

Reluctantly Miss Todd felt compelled to acknowledge to herself that the letter was a charming production. Fanny wrote a beautiful and legible hand. She expressed herself well and conveyed her meaning without unnecessary words. To Mrs. Lawley she explained briefly that Miss Todd wished her old friend to know that she had returned home and was practically recovered from her recent illness. Miss Todd, of course, wanted to write herself, but her guest had undertaken the office as she thought Miss Todd rather fatigued by the journey. The ex-invalid murmured approval and gratitude.

"Thank you so much, Fanny."

"Is there anything more you'd like me to say?"

"No, thank you. That's just right. Will you address the envelope, and you'll find stamps in that little drawer under the pigeon-holes."

"What is the address, dear?"

"How stupid of me! It's in my address-book. Where did I put that? Do you mind looking in the right-hand drawer? It ought to be there."

Fanny found the desired article, brought it to Miss Todd, copied down the address at her dictation, and stamped and closed the envelope. Afterwards Miss Todd wondered hazily whether she had been wise to give Fanny access to anything that held all her friends' addresses, but Fanny could not make use of such knowledge. Besides, Fanny was a gentlewoman and Miss Todd's guest. She would never, never pry into Miss Todd's private affairs.

"That's done," Fanny announced cheerily. "How about posting it, Emily?"

"Will you leave it on the hall-table, and one of the maids will take it out?"

"Yes, dear. Where is the post?"

"There's a little wall pillar-box down the road, but the post-office is quite a walk. Do you want stamps?"

"No, thank you. You put a sweet little box with them in my room. I think I'll just write a letter, though, and then I could post it with yours."

"Taylor will take it."

"I'll run down with both, the way I used to do at the Woolpack. May I use your desk, instead of writing in my own room?"

"Of course."

Fanny Anderson wrote letters and Miss Todd slept. She was ashamed when she woke to find that it was half-past twelve. Fanny ought not to have let her lie there like this. So lazy!

"Nonsense, dearest! You were quite worn out. I could see that, and it's all my fault, letting you walk so much in the gardens."

"Oh, no. The fresh air was very pleasant."

"So I found it when I popped out with your letter and mine."

"You shouldn't have done that, Fanny. Taylor could have gone."

"I like to be useful."

"I don't expect my guests to run my errands."

"Well, the letters are posted now, and we've both got easy consciences. I think I'll trot up to my room, if you don't mind, and tidy myself. You said lunch was at half-past one, didn't you? But Mr. Massey may be early, and you'll want him to yourself."

Fanny departed, nodding and smiling. Miss Todd relaxed and lay back. What a relief it was to be alone! Presently she must follow Fanny's example and prepare for lunch, but a few minutes more on the sofa would not harm anybody. The few minutes extended to three-quarters of an hour as Miss Todd fell asleep again. She only woke to hear voices in the hall, a man's and Mary's. Heavens! Mr. Massey had arrived, urbane and punctual. Miss Todd thought ruefully of her appearance. How hideously at a disadvantage she felt! She had not even washed her hands. They were sticky, hot, and her face creased with sleep. As the door opened she struggled to the floor.

"Mr. Massey, ma'am."

"Thank you, Mary. Good morning, Mr. Massey."

"Well, well, my dear Miss Emily! Good morning. And how are you? It's a great pleasure to see you again."

"How kind of you! I'm delighted to see you. Do sit down. Lunch will be in a few minutes."

Mr. Massey selected a chair near Miss Todd's sofa. She confessed, with a little laugh: "I've been lying here most of the morning. Isn't that dreadful of me?"

"No. I should call it very wise. You've been ill, you know."

"Oh, but I'm quite better now."

"I hope so, only you mustn't overtax your strength. Are you sure you're able to see me so soon?"

"Yes, yes, quite. There's so much to tell you."

"I understand. And returning home alone, to an empty house— Well, it must have been extremely trying. I miss my old friend still, though his death was a happy release." Mr. Massey coughed.

"Poor Papa! He thought so much of you." Miss Todd sighed. "But I'm not alone. I've brought a friend back with me."

"Dear me! This is news. Your letters said nothing of it."

"Oh, I thought I'd mentioned Miss Anderson in them. She was staying at the same hotel and looked after me most kindly when I fell ill."

"Indeed? Indeed? And how did your excellent Timmins like that?"

Miss Todd's head drooped and her voice took a mournful note.

"Timmins has left me."

"Left you? Miss Emily! Only for a holiday, surely?"

"No—for good."

Mr. Massey looked rather nonplussed.

"I hope— I trust— Was there—unpleasantness?"

"N-no. At least— She told me she was going to be married."

"At her age! Well, there's no fool like an old fool."

Miss Todd laughed weakly.

"Oh, Mr. Massey! Poor Timmins! She isn't as ancient as that."

"She is not a young woman."

There was an awkward silence.

"Surely she did not leave you, even to be married, when you were away from home and seriously ill?"

"I— I had Miss Anderson."

"In place of your maid?"

"Not exactly. Oh, no, not as my maid. She's a—a friend."

"And, do I understand, has accompanied you home and is staying with you?"

"Yes."

Mr. Massey looked severe and judicial.

"I hope you ascertained something about her before admitting her to such a degree of intimacy?"

"Only what she told me." Miss Todd felt irritated, reckless, and defiant.

"My dear Miss Emily, was it wise to bring her back with you? Who is she?"

(Who was Fanny Anderson?)

"Her father was a clergyman."

"Ah! Alive?"

"No. She's like me, an orphan, and seems rather alone in the world. You'll meet her at lunch. There's the gong. Shall we come?"

Mr. Massey bowed and prepared to follow his hostess.

In the sun-shot dimness of the hall Miss Todd made out Fanny's figure directly she and Mr. Massey emerged from the morning-room. Fanny was

standing by the oak table just behind the door. Her attitude was easy, negligent, graceful, as she bent over a bowl of snapdragons and aquilegia, but—— Had Miss Todd imagined that as she and her visitor crossed the morning-room floor footsteps retreated outside? Nonsense! She must not allow herself to get into this unfair, unkind habit of suspecting Fanny of such undesirable traits as eavesdropping. Besides, if she had listened, Fanny would not have heard anything to her discredit. Miss Todd had merely explained her presence to Mr. Massey. She must introduce them.

"Oh, Fanny!" she began nervously.

"There you are, dearest Emily. I heard the gong, so I came down."

"Yes. I'm sure you're ready for lunch. May I introduce Mr. Massey to you? This is Miss Anderson, Mr. Massey, who is staying with me."

"How do you do? Emily has often spoken of you."

"How do you do?"

Fanny smiled and Mr. Massey bowed.

"Will you both come into the dining-room?" Miss Todd suggested.

Fanny slipped her arm through Miss Todd's. They went in together, Mr. Massey close behind. Rose and Taylor were waiting. The artichoke soup was ready in a vast tureen.

Miss Todd was old-fashioned. She asked Mr. Massey to say Grace and told herself that the mocking gleam she caught in Fanny's eyes was her imagination. As a clergyman's daughter Fanny must surely be accustomed to the ritual of Grace before meat?

Taylor had pulled the blinds partly down. The room felt cool, fragrant with the scent of the sweet peas in the middle of the table. Miss Todd sat at the head, but Mr. Massey, at her request, carved when the joint was brought in. Fanny sat with her back to the window, her face in shadow. She did not contribute much to the conversation. As a rule it flowed easily. Mr. Massey liked the sound of his own voice and enjoyed his polished periods, Miss Todd merely interpolating a leading remark or an occasional question, but to-day there were gaps, pauses, awkward silence. It could not be because Fanny was present? Oh, no, no!

Neither she nor Mr. Massey, Miss Todd realized, took much notice of one another. As civility demanded, Mr. Massey included Fanny in his observations to his hostess and Fanny deferred gracefully to Mr. Massey's superior judgment when her opinion was asked. Otherwise—only afterwards was the fact borne in upon Miss Todd—Fanny subtly indicated that she was an outsider, an interloper, whilst dearest Emily and her Mr. Massey had so much in common, based on long friendship and old associations. Nervously Miss Todd wondered what Mr. Massey thought of Fanny.

"And you had fine weather when you were away?" Mr. Massey inquired.

"Most of the time. Of course there was some rain." Miss Todd looked over at Fanny. "In fact, it was getting wet that caused my stupid illness. At least, Miss Anderson thought so."

"I'm sure it was, Emily."

"A good thing you had Timmins," Mr. Massey declared. "Ah! I forgot——"

There was an uncomfortable silence, the thought of Timmins crossing

each mind. Miss Todd wondered worriedly whether she had justified her behaviour to Timmins in Mr. Massey's eyes. From Mr. Massey's inscrutable face it was impossible to guess what his feelings with regard to the Timmins episode were, and Fanny— What did Fanny think? She looked serene, unruffled, and sat eating fruit salad with placid enjoyment.

"Do take some cream, Fanny," Miss Todd urged awkwardly.

"No, thank you. This is delicious by itself."

"I prefer my favourite pudding," announced Mr. Massey. "You and Mrs. Crabbie spoil me, Miss Emily."

"She always remembers that you liked it the first time she tried this recipe."

"You're not eating very much yourself." Mr. Massey's tone was gently reproachful.

Miss Todd shook her head. She was not hungry. The hot weather usually took away her appetite. In any case, she never ate very much at lunch. Did she, Fanny?

Thus addressed and appealed to, Miss Anderson smiled. Truth to tell, she admitted, she had never noticed. All the same—a flutter of eyelashes in the lawyer's direction—Mr. Massey was perfectly right. Emily was not eating. "You know, dearest, after an illness you want building up. Don't you think so, Mr. Massey?"

"Yes. I'm sure you are right, Miss Anderson."

"Emily hasn't the least idea of taking care of herself." Fanny shook a playful finger at her friend. "Now, don't begin to argue, Emily, because it's true. Do you know, this morning we had quite a little—well, not exactly an argument, but shall we say a breeze?—before I could persuade her to drink a glass of wine?"

"A most excellent innovation."

"Oh, Mr. Massey, you don't approve? Wine in the middle of the morning!"

"Circumstances alter cases, my dear Miss Emily." Mr. Massey joined the tips of his long, lean fingers together and sat back in his chair. "Now you, I know, are only just convalescent after an illness in trying circumstances. Your recent bereavement— Being laid up when away from home— Naturally it will take a little longer than in an ordinary case for you to be restored entirely to your usual even health. I advocate most heartily the course of—er—treatment prescribed by Miss Anderson, dear friend."

"Now, you see, Emily." Fanny was archly triumphant. "Didn't I tell you that I was right?"

"Yes, dear."

Of course Fanny had been right. Fanny always was. Always. Always. Even when wrong—glaringly, palpably wrong—Fanny never admitted it. She insinuated the other person into the dock, so to speak, and sat in judgment herself, emerging aggressively, triumphantly right. . . .

"I want her to have a glass every morning." Fanny sighed gently. "She's promised, but if you exert your authority, Mr. Massey, and say she must, I'm sure she'll be far more ready to obey."

"Two against one, Miss Emily. You haven't a chance."

"Oh, Mr. Massey, that's too bad. I hoped you'd support me."

"Mr. Massey has more sense. He knows that I'm right," Fanny cooed.

"Entirely right, Miss Anderson."

"I'm so glad to hear you say so. Now, in future, Emily, if you're inclined to be naughty and obstinate, I shall just say: 'Mr. Massey's orders.'"

Mr. Massey laughed. Fanny laughed. In the background Rose and Taylor exchanged smiles. Miss Todd felt helpless, exasperated, out-manceuvred. How cleverly Fanny had played her cards! She had awakened Mr. Massey's friendly sympathy on Miss Todd's behalf, seized the opportunity to display the way she had bullied—yes, that was the only word—her into drinking wine she did not want, and had gained Mr. Massey's approval for the pernicious practice to be continued. Miss Todd was not minded to let Fanny escape altogether.

"I've promised, but it was only on condition that Miss Anderson kept me company," she announced. "You know you said you would, Fanny."

"Well, why not?" Mr. Massey asked.

He was beaming happily as though the preposterous arrangement had his entire sanction. The next thing would be Miss Todd's unfortunate heart. She saw it dragged into the conversation, exhibited, examined, discussed, and Fanny's suggestions as to rest, care, the avoidance of over-fatigue, and the acceptance of Fanny's solicitous nursing cordially approved. No; really that would be too much.

"It's only very temporary," she declared determinedly. "Just as long as you are here, Fanny dear."

"Oh, you mustn't lapse into bad ways directly I'm gone," Fanny wailed. "Mr. Massey, you'll have to keep an eye on her. Emily has no idea of taking care of herself. Her heart——"

A crisp biscuit snapped sharply in two with the pressure of Miss Todd's fingers. "Her heart?" echoed Mr. Massey.

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"Of course Mr. Massey didn't. There's nothing to know," countered Miss Todd.

Mr. Massey continued to look concerned and surprised.

"My dear Miss Emily, I remember that your mother was a great sufferer with her heart. There is much debate and uncertainty as to whether heart-disease is hereditary, but some weakness may have been transmitted to you. I think you should exercise extreme care in case——"

"Oh, how wise of you, Mr. Massey!" Fanny clasped her hands. "Do persuade Emily not to run any risks."

"I think you're both making a great fuss about nothing." Miss Todd spoke sulkily. "Fanny, I don't know where you got such an idea."

"Only from the evidence of my own eyes, dearest Emily."

"What evidence? You never saw me having a heart-attack. I—I've never had one for you to see."

Her voice sounded shrill, bordering on hysteria. How terrible if she lost her temper, attacked Fanny, started an argument at luncheon, and before Mr. Massey! She gulped and crushed her embroidered table-napkin in both hands.

"Why, Emily"—Fanny was gently reproachful, anxious lest her friend should over-excite herself, but not, Miss Todd noted, surprised—"I never intended to imply that. All I meant was that mounting stairs or hurrying or any exertion seem to make you very breathless, and that's a symptom of heart trouble." She appealed to Mr. Massey. "Isn't it?"

"I understand so."

"And after Emily's illness—— Oh, I don't mean that she should stay in bed, or consider herself in any way an invalid, but ordinary care couldn't do any harm."

"I do take ordinary care, Fanny."

"Not always. This morning I shouldn't have let you walk so long in the gardens."

"But I wanted to show them to you, and it was very pleasant out."

"I know, only I feel that I was selfish and inconsiderate."

"You needn't." Miss Todd's tones were cool. "You made me rest after we came in, and I fell sound asleep."

"That shows how tired you must have been, you poor thing!"

Hotly Miss Todd resented being called a poor thing at her own board and in Mr. Massey's presence, but she had no defence. She was tired. She did fall asleep. If she argued further Fanny would only tell her that excessive fatigue was another symptom of heart trouble, and Miss Todd's involuntary sojourn in the land of Nod had been simply an additional proof of her suffering from this. Mr. Massey, delicately peeling a peach, was certain to agree with Fanny. He seemed to have gone completely over to the enemy.

"Shall we have coffee in the drawing-room?" Miss Todd inquired coldly.

"That would be delightful." Mr. Massey had finished his peach and stood up.

"I won't have any, thank you." Fanny was lingering as Miss Todd moved towards the door. "Don't you and Mr. Massey want to talk business, Emily?"

"I came with that intention." Mr. Massey was smiling. "But if Miss Emily is not feeling quite up to it, another time would do perfectly well."

"I am quite up to it." Miss Todd's voice was taut, determined. "Let's drink our coffee in the library, Mr. Massey, as Miss Anderson won't have any, and we can go into things afterwards. What about you, Fanny?"

"Oh, I'll be perfectly all right, dear. I think I'll go on with a book I picked up in my bedroom last night. May I sit in the garden?"

"Of course."

Miss Todd was ashamed of her own feeling of relief at the realization that during the conversation with Mr. Massey Fanny would actually be out of the house. There was no fear of her overhearing—— No, no, no! It was abominable to suspect that Fanny had listened outside the door when Miss Todd and Mr. Massey were talking over the telephone the previous evening. Those footsteps must have been a figment of her imagination. Fanny simply would not have had time to slip back to the drawing-room and be sitting on the sofa as Miss Todd had found her. All the same, with finance under discussion, it was more agreeable to feel free from any eavesdropper. She hoped that Mr. Massey did not want to examine every item of her expenditure whilst she had been away. It was so hot, and Fanny seemed to have drained the last ounce of vitality out of her. . . .

"How tired you look!" Mr. Massey's voice was guarded, sympathetic.

"I suppose I am. It's only the heat."

"All the same, your friend may be right. I blame myself for not suspecting that your heart——"

"Oh, Mr. Massey, please don't let Fanny put that idea into your head. My heart's perfectly sound."

"We'll hope so."

Mr. Massey did not seem satisfied or convinced. Miss Todd writhed with annoyance.

The library was an agreeable place on a hot day. Large, glass-fronted book-cases, holding their treasures in calf and tooled leather, lined three walls. Along the remaining one ran a row of windows, framed in heavy curtains. There were deep chairs and a thick Axminster carpet and fat sofas. Miss Todd seated herself before the claw-footed mahogany coffee-table and poured out from a Queen Anne coffee-pot into sage-green Wedgwood cups.

It was very pleasant and peaceful, she reflected. She sat here, in her own house, dispensing hospitality to her old friend, agreeably anticipating a discussion in which Mr. Massey would arrange everything for her approval and convenience. How delightful this was, just the two of them, no Fanny! Still, she must give Fanny full credit for possessing and displaying tact. If she had wished for coffee that would have meant its being partaken of in the drawing-room, and afterwards neither Mr. Massey nor his hostess would have liked to suggest abandoning Fanny and retiring to the library together. Fanny had really been very adroit and made the situation easy to handle. And she had, rather ostentatiously, perhaps, announced her intention of sitting in the garden with a book. That absolved Miss Todd from entertaining her until after Mr. Massey had gone. Oh, decidedly Fanny had tact on occasion.

"No milk and one lump of sugar?" Miss Todd asked.

"Thank you. You always remember my tastes."

The cool dimness of the library was very restful. Miss Todd's eyes wandered to a many-cushioned sofa and she stifled a desire to stretch her limbs out on its mottled tapestry cover and fall asleep. How ridiculous! She had had a perfectly good night and in addition an entirely unauthorized rest before lunch. It was absurd to feel so limp and devitalized. Could she attribute it to Fanny—Fanny's unaccustomed presence, the way Fanny had continually irritated her since their arrival together? Or—Miss Todd caught her breath—was Fanny right, and had she really something wrong with her heart? Perhaps—perhaps if she admitted that she had it might serve as a means of sometimes escaping from Fanny. She could propose having a day in bed now and again, or her breakfast brought to her there. Only occasionally, of course.

Nonsense! She was thinking and manœuvring as though Fanny planned and intended to be a permanent inmate of the Croft. She should be nothing of the kind. Fanny was a visitor, and as such had no right to dictate to Miss Todd and map out plans for the safeguarding of her health. There was nothing wrong with her heart. Mr. Massey must be firmly disabused of any such idea.

"What about business?" she inquired, smiling.

"I am quite ready, but do you think that you ought to fatigue yourself?"

"It won't tire me. You do all the work."

"Well, then——"

Miss Todd rang for Rose to remove the tray with the coffee-cups. Mr. Massey adjusted his reading spectacles, and the bills and other documents relative to Miss Todd's sojourns at the Green Dragon and the Woolpack Inn were duly investigated.

It might have been the hot weather, the warm room, reaction after the strain of Fanny's constant and exacting presence, the backwash of her recent illness, but certainly Miss Todd felt extraordinarily sleepy and exceptionally stupid. As a rule, despite Fanny's assertions to the contrary, she followed intelligently enough Mr. Massey's explanations about expenditure. On this occasion her eyelids kept dropping over her eyes, and she was constantly forced to jerk herself awake. Mr. Massey's suave, benignant accents grew to have the monotony of a bee buzzing up and down a window-pane. She tried to take in what he was saying, to answer or comment suitably, but the effort was an enormous one. Feebly Miss Todd resented this inexplicable fatigue. It could not be due—horrible thought!—to over-indulgence in wine?

Absurd! Those two small glasses, almost forcibly administered by Fanny, had been swallowed hours ago. At lunch she had drunk only lemonade. Such speculations were futile. Again she roused herself to attend to her trustee.

"I must confess that I am puzzled," Mr. Massey was saying. "These bills for the two hotels—I presume that the accounts from the Green Dragon cover your own and Timmins' expenses, Miss Emily, but the ones for your sojourn at the—er—Woolpack are almost, I might say, irregular."

Feebly Miss Todd ejaculated: "Oh!"

"Was it a very superior and expensive establishment? From your letters I had gathered the impression that it must be on quite a small scale."

"Oh, yes. It was—it was just a little country hotel. No, hardly that. You'd call it an inn, I suppose."

"And yet for your stay there they appear to have charged practically double what you paid at the Green Dragon, Derriford's principal hotel."

Mr. Massey was looking severe, almost disapproving. Miss Todd endeavoured to rally her wits.

"I was ill, you remember. I dare say they charged extra because of that, meals upstairs, and so on. In fact I know they did. Fanny——"

Miss Todd stopped. Mr. Massey waited. At length he murmured very gently: "Yes, my dear Miss Emily? What about Miss Anderson?"

"I—I said to her that I thought the bill was rather a lot, particularly as I hadn't eaten very much all the time I was in bed, and she said hotels always charged extra for illness."

"Yes?"

"She was very kind. I didn't want to make a fuss, so Fanny took the bill back to Mrs. Roper, and I suppose she reduced it. Anyway, I didn't pay nearly so much as they asked at first."

Mr. Massey snatched off his glasses and polished them vigorously. The sight of so much action caused Miss Todd to feel limper than ever.

"But, my dear friend— Really, this is very perplexing. I might say distressing." He replaced the glasses and took up one of the bills again. "Do I understand—I may have failed to apprehend your meaning correctly—

that this account, this preposterous charge, paid, I see, is considerably less than what was originally demanded?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Then, Miss Emily, that was barefaced robbery."

"Was it?"

"I consider it so."

"I—I don't know. My illness—— Timmins leaving me—— I may have been stupid, Mr. Massey, and let them cheat me, but I suppose I was poorly and didn't—didn't realize I was being—exploited."

"Evidently you did not. But it was downright sharp practice. And Miss Anderson persuaded the proprietrix to alter the bill?"

"Yes; I couldn't face an argument with her."

"Even so, you were very considerably over-charged."

"Oh!"

Miss Todd leant back, shattered, bewildered, faintly suspicious. Was it possible that Fanny had made out the bill, together with Mrs. Roper, and the two had arranged that Miss Todd should be cheated by being presented with a much larger account than her stay warranted? It could not be. Fanny would never—— And, as a mere guest like Miss Todd, how did she come to have anything to do with the Woolpack's book-keeping? Miss Todd's head swam. Her dazed wits reminded her that she must endeavour to keep from Mr. Massey the full extent of her folly, the fact that after paying the reduced account she had rashly presented Fanny with the change, the difference. . . .

Mr. Massey need not know, must not know. She, Emily Todd, was a free agent, a woman in control of her own money, not accountable to him or anybody else for what she chose to spend or how she chose to spend it. Fanny had said so. In a way Fanny was right when she hinted—nay, more than hinted, stressed—that Mr. Massey had too much to do with Miss Todd's money affairs.

"You see?" Mr. Massey asked patiently.

"Yes, but it—it doesn't matter. After all, I'm quite—well off—you told me so yourself—and if I did pay rather too much it won't harm anybody except myself."

Miss Todd's smile was tremulous, appealing, but Mr. Massey refused to be appeased.

"It is the principle of the thing, Miss Emily. These people, if they tried such underhand methods once and, in the slang phrase, got away with it, will probably do it again with other clients. I must confess that I am not satisfied. I think I shall write to this inn myself. What is the proprietor's name? You mentioned a Mrs. Roper." He was scrutinizing the account. "Ah, yes. Bowles. Charles Bowles."

"That's the man Timmins was going to marry. He's a widower. Mrs. Roper is his sister-in-law."

"I understand. Well, it might be more satisfactory if I communicated with him."

"Oh, Mr. Massey, please don't. It will make me look such a fool."

"Not at all, Miss Emily. No doubt these folks thought that they would take advantage of your recent illness and your—er—inexperience, and rob you. That is what it amounts to."

"I—I see."

"Besides, this might be an excellent, an invaluable opportunity to ascertain the exact position of your maid Timmins. If she is married, you will like the fact established. If not, it would be a satisfaction to know where she is."

Miss Todd remained silent.

"I must say this is all rather perplexing. I should have supposed that Timmins, your late mother's maid and then your own, in service here for such a number of years, was far too loyal, too fond of you, to desert you at such a time."

"I suppose she—— Mrs. Crabbie thought it was because of marrying. Timmins isn't young, and it seemed rather nice for her."

"But why give notice and leave so abruptly? You were ill. Unless this man proposed an immediate marriage why could not Timmins have stayed until you were convalescent, seen you home safely, and then been married from here? I am sure you would not have objected to that."

"No. I'd have liked it. But Fanny—Miss Anderson—— I think she had the impression that Timmins was rather neglecting me when I was ill, and she spoke to her about it——"

"Miss Emily, do I hear aright? Miss Anderson, a mere hotel acquaintance, took it upon herself to criticize the conduct of another person's servant to the woman herself?"

"Fanny meant kindly."

"Possibly, but it strikes me as a piece of gross impertinence and gratuitous interference on her part. Surely you did not permit her to take Timmins to task?"

"I—I don't remember very well what happened." Miss Todd's voice quivered ominously. "Fanny told Timmins that she was neglecting me, and Timmins resented it and said she wished to leave."

"Did she allege her impending marriage as an excuse?"

"She said she was engaged to Mr. Bowles."

"And you took no steps to ascertain from the man Bowles himself whether this were true?"

"I didn't like to. I did suggest speaking to him, but Fanny—— It seemed no business of mine. Timmins isn't a young girl whom I'd feel responsible for. I wanted to ask her to stay longer, only Fanny thought it better to let her go immediately."

"And where?"

"I—don't know."

"Miss Emily, that isn't like you."

Mr. Massey's tone was grave, reproachful. Miss Todd bit her lip.

"Well, what could I have done, Mr. Massey? Timmins wanted to leave. She gave me notice. I—I couldn't compel her to stop."

"Don't over-excite yourself, pray. We must discuss this calmly."

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"Am I to understand that you had no conversation with Timmins about her future, in short, that she resigned her situation, left at once, and you were merely given the impression from Timmins herself, uncorroborated by any other person, that she was contemplating marrying this man Bowles?"

Miss Todd inclined her head. Her mouth felt dry, her throat constricted. Speech was temporarily impossible.

"It all seems very strange."

"I think Timmins treated me abominably."

"She does not appear to have acted as considerably as one would expect, but—— What line did she take when Miss Anderson found fault with her?"

"Oh, she—she was rather truculent, and I suppose as she was being married she thought it didn't matter leaving me in the lurch."

"But was she being married?"

"I'd no reason to suppose otherwise."

"If she had expressed regret for acting hastily and asked to retain her situation, would you have been willing to keep her?"

"Of course. I—I hoped she might reconsider her notice."

"But she did not?"

"No."

"And it was Miss Anderson who advised her leaving you immediately?"

"Fanny thought it no good her staying when she'd leave in any case as soon as Mr. Bowles was ready to marry her."

"My dear Miss Emily, why did you permit a stranger to interfere to such an extent in your private affairs?"

"Oh, Fanny didn't interfere. She was most kind. After Timmins had gone she did any amount for me that I was too unwell to do for myself. But for Fanny I'd have had to go to a nursing-home, or have a nurse, and they hate illness in hotels. Fanny said so."

Mr. Massey fell silent. He examined afresh the papers Miss Todd had laid before him. She sat in a rather miserable silence. A barrier, subtle, intangible, seemed to have grown up between them. Whose fault was it? Obviously Mr. Massey thought her callous, uncaring, indifferent in the Timmins affair, but it was difficult to explain how ill she had felt, how executive and managing Fanny had been, and how Miss Todd had found it physically and in every other way impossible to withstand her, to cling to Timmins, to tell Fanny that she wanted Timmins to stay at least until the marriage. Mr. Massey would not understand. He would think it grotesque, ridiculous, for a stranger such as Fanny had been then to have established such a complete ascendancy over Miss Todd in a comparatively short time. He would only say that she ought never to have allowed Fanny to dictate to her to this extent. Already he had said so. . . .

"Well, it is all very perplexing and distressing." Abruptly Mr. Massey thrust the papers aside. "I wish you had written fully to me at the time. I could have advised you. I might even have come down myself to look into the matter."

"Oh, it wasn't worth while troubling you about my domestic affairs." Miss Todd smiled feebly. "I don't mind asking your help and advice when it's a money business, but my maid—— That didn't seem exactly your province. And I was really feeling too poorly to write a long letter."

"Then why did you not wire?"

"I—I didn't think of it."

"It's not too late, you know. Won't you authorize me to take up the question of this outrageous overcharge, and at the same time institute inquiries into the man Bowles' matrimonial intentions towards Timmins?"

Miss Todd did not really realize it until this sunny afternoon of Fanny Anderson's burial, but her own answer to Mr. Massey's suggestion, had it

been a different one, might have changed her whole subsequent life. For a second she toyed with accepting it; then the thought of Fanny halted her. Could she face Fanny's steely wrath when she learned that behind her back Miss Todd had allowed Mr. Massey to discover where Timmins was, what had become of her, whether Mr. Bowles had married her or abandoned her to a cold world, and, worse still, had practically accused the Woolpack of cheating Miss Todd over her bill? Fanny would be so angry. She might even think that Miss Todd suspected her (Fanny) of acting in concert with Mrs. Roper to rob her. It would be another version of the affair of Fanny and the money in the train.

Timmins did not deserve Mr. Massey's concern and consideration or kindly offices. She had lost her head at the prospect of becoming a married woman and deserted Miss Todd when the latter was ill in a strange place. The maid could fend for herself. If Mr. Bowles did not marry her she could easily obtain another situation. Should it transpire that she was not married to Mr. Bowles she might expect Miss Todd to let her come back. Fanny would disapprove most strongly. Miss Todd did not really want Timmins. The arrangement of Mary replacing her had been practically settled with Mrs. Crabbie. In any case there was no hurry. After Fanny's visit ended Mr. Massey might, if he liked, write to the Woolpack. Miss Todd temporized—and was lost.

"I'd really rather you didn't, Mr. Massey," she pleaded. "One has to buy one's experience, you know, in life. Dear Papa always said so. I'll just have to be more careful if I go away again, and supposing I wanted to return to the Woolpack it wouldn't be pleasant if there had been any inquiry into their charges, or—or they thought I'd felt I'd been imposed on."

Miss Todd's stumbling speech faltered to a conclusion. Mr. Massey removed and put away his glasses. There was a cold finality about the action which frightened her. When he spoke his voice was chilly, unfriendly.

"You must, of course, please yourself, Miss Emily. As your trustee I am only able to advise, not to coerce you. I think myself that a thorough investigation into these accounts would be desirable, but as you obviously do not wish it I accept your decision."

"Thank you," quavered Miss Todd.

"In the more personal matter of your former maid you must do as you think best. I am still of opinion that it was considerably complicated by Miss Anderson's interference, but that is your affair."

"Oh, I'm sure Fanny meant well."

"She is your guest at present?"

"Yes."

"May I inquire for how long?"

"I—I don't know. Nothing was arranged. A week or ten days, I suppose."

"Then she returns to Derriford? Does she live there?"

"I'm not certain. Her parents are dead, and she is badly off. She spoke of finding some post."

"Of what nature?"

"A companion, I expect. She said she wasn't trained in any way."

"All that you have learned about her I presume she told you herself?"

"Yes." Miss Todd's voice sounded small, frightened.

"In that case—— My dear Miss Emily, was it wise to bring this complete stranger into your home?"

"But Fanny's perfectly all right, Mr. Massey. She's a clergyman's daughter."

"Have you taken any steps to substantiate that statement?"

"No. But—— There's no necessity. Fanny wouldn't make it up."

Mr. Massey said nothing.

Miss Todd broke the silence, an uncomfortable, pregnant silence, by saying peevishly:

"It's too bad that you seem to have taken such a dislike to my poor Fanny."

"I do not dislike Miss Anderson. It is only that, as your late father's friend, Miss Emily, and your own trustee, I feel in a measure responsible for you. You have already acknowledged that Miss Anderson was largely to blame for Timmins' desertion of you at a notably unfortunate time, and in the face of that you invite Miss Anderson to be your guest, and admit her to a considerable degree of intimacy. She was concerned in these bills."

"She—she helped to get the Woolpack one reduced."

"Precisely."

Miss Todd sat regarding Mr. Massey rather helplessly.

"I must confess that I do not like it, Miss Emily."

"But—— What can I do?"

"At the moment, nothing. I can only recommend, or, to use a stronger term, urge you not to prolong Miss Anderson's visit beyond the length demanded by ordinary courtesy to a guest."

"I—I can't tell Fanny to go."

"Surely Miss Anderson's own right feeling will prompt her to arrange for her departure within a reasonable time?"

Miss Todd twisted her hands uneasily.

"Supposing she doesn't?" she whispered.

"Then you must take steps yourself."

Again Miss Todd said blankly: "What can I do?"

"Could you not invite another visitor? There is your old friend Mrs. Lawley. I am sure she would be delighted to come to you."

"Yes. After Papa died she wrote and suggested paying me a visit, but—— It isn't as though we hadn't plenty of room here. I can hardly tell Fanny her bedroom will be wanted."

"You can mention to Miss Anderson, if necessary, that Mrs. Lawley is an old lady who will require your individual care and, in short, that a third person would be entirely superfluous. If she has any tact that will induce her to leave."

"Oh, Fanny's very tactful. Look at the way she wouldn't have coffee and made it so easy for us to come in here and talk."

"Miss Anderson would hardly, I imagine, intrude on a business interview."

"I—I don't know. If Mrs. Lawley came she might think she ought to stop to—to save me."

"In what way?"

"Oh, talking to her, and perhaps reading aloud. She—she likes taking

trouble off my shoulders. I wrote to Mrs. Lawley to-day—at least I intended to—but Fanny wrote for me and posted the letter and was very kind.”

“I see. A highly executive personality.” Mr. Massey’s tone was cool. “My dear Miss Emily, pray do not think that I under-value your friend. I only implore you not to allow her to establish herself here too firmly. You might find it very difficult to dislodge her.”

Long afterwards Miss Todd realized that she had acted with an obstinacy which, viewed from the angle of later events, seemed incredible. At the time Mr. Massey’s open dislike and obvious distrust of Fanny, his evident desire that Miss Todd should sever the acquaintance as speedily and completely as possible, only served to increase her championship of Fanny. Mr. Massey did not understand. He thought her a fool, ready to be exploited by Fanny, and just because Fanny might have been a little precipitate and interfering in the matter of Timmins he rushed to the conclusion that she was managing, unscrupulous, domineering, and undesirable. Fanny had hinted that Mr. Massey overruled Miss Todd and did not allow her to attend to her own affairs, as she was perfectly capable of doing. In money matters his was undoubtedly the wiser head, but when it came to personal relationships Mr. Massey’s regulating of these was altogether too much. Miss Todd felt very angry.

“You don’t understand.” She spoke coldly. “Miss Anderson is my friend and here as my guest. I mayn’t have invited her for any definite time, but I’m sure she would never outstay her welcome.”

“That is fortunate.”

“When we were in the hot-house this morning I said something about the flower-show in August, and—and Fanny said she would be gone long before then.”

“Did you, may I inquire, press her to remain?”

“N-no.”

“That was very wise.”

Another uncomfortable silence followed.

“I’ll think about inviting Mrs. Lawley,” Miss Todd promised.

“You must do as you wish there, Miss Emily. I only suggest that it would be a prudent move.”

“Yes. Perhaps—perhaps she might know of something—some post which would suit Fanny.”

“Quite possibly.” Mr. Massey consulted his watch and exclaimed at the lateness of the hour. “Forgive me. I must hurry away.”

“Oh, won’t you wait for tea? We’re having it in the garden.”

“Very delightful, but I fear that I cannot stay to partake of it. I have to go to the office, as I neglected my duties there this morning.”

“Oh, Mr. Massey, I hope you didn’t give up the office just to come and attend to my stupid business.”

“Not at all, Miss Emily. I was there as usual, but I left early in order to enjoy your hospitality, and to have a talk about your affairs.” His tone stiffened. “I only regret that it has not been more satisfactory to both parties.”

“You were very kind, but I don’t think it’s any use my bothering about Timmins now, or—or those bills.”

“Well, just as you please. Now, may I ring up for the car? Any

time I can advise or assist, pray command me. I am always at your service."

Mr. Massey bowed over Miss Todd's hand with old-fashioned courtesy and turned to the telephone. Miss Todd effaced herself quietly. She had better order tea to be brought out to the lawn under the copper-beech and then find Fanny. In the hall she encountered Taylor, carrying a tray of silver towards the dining-room.

"Oh, Taylor, I think we'll have tea out. It's so warm this afternoon."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Just Miss Anderson and myself. Mr. Massey can't stay."

"Yes, ma'am."

Taylor disappeared. Miss Todd put on a wide-brimmed hat and went down the steps. Odd how tired she felt, how disinclined to make conversation with Fanny, to parry insidious questions, to play the attentive hostess. It was a pity that Fanny had so few methods of amusing herself. There was the rest of the afternoon, the evening, the next day, and the next and the next. Miss Todd had resented Mr. Massey's blunt suggestion that she should hasten Fanny's departure, but she felt now that if Fanny were to announce her intention of leaving the Croft Miss Todd would most certainly not oppose it.

Where was Fanny? Miss Todd looked through the rose-garden, glanced into the summer-house, explored sundry walks and enclosures, but saw no sign of her. Finally she turned down a path running below the library windows. It was a dark place, fenced by a high, straggling, privet hedge, and at one end led past a potting-shed to a rubbish-heap and a piece of uncultivated ground. There was little colour, though some rank hollyhocks and foxgloves flaunted their ragged garments, and gaunt sunflowers made a strident patch of amber. Trees, dark, gnarled, huddled together as though for company, kept off the sun. Fanny had brought out a deck-chair and sat in it, a book open on her lap. Her eyes were closed. Presumably she had fallen asleep whilst reading. When Miss Todd addressed her she woke with a start.

"Why—— I—— Oh, dearest Emily, is that you? I believe I've been asleep."

"Well, why shouldn't you?"

Miss Todd spoke half-absently. Her thoughts were otherwise occupied than with answering Fanny's semi-apology for her daytime drowsiness. Why had Fanny, out of the range of the entire gardens, selected this uninteresting, unsuitable, stuffy spot? The library windows stood open. Was it possible that Miss Todd's conversation with Mr. Massey, any of it, had been audible to Fanny seated immediately below? How much had she heard? Had she deliberately chosen to sit there for purposes of eaves-dropping?

"What a funny place to read in!" she told Fanny.

"Oh, no, dear. It's delightfully cool and secluded."

"It's horrid. That rubbish further on attracts all the flies and wasps, and though the sun's shut off by that hedge it's dreadfully close."

"I haven't found it so."

"Why didn't you sit on the lawn or in the rose-garden?"

"Well, really, Emily, you sound quite annoyed. I didn't know that any

part of your lovely grounds was marked *Trespassers will be Prosecuted.*" Fanny was smiling, half-amused, half-annoyed by Miss Todd's attitude. "I've been perfectly happy here, I assure you."

Miss Todd bit her lip. No, she couldn't ask Fanny whether she had overheard anything that she and Mr. Massey had said to one another. It was a horrible accusation to bring against anybody, particularly a guest. Perhaps Fanny had thought that she would have more privacy if she sat away from any portion of the garden where Grier was working. And if she really had been asleep she could not have heard anything that mattered. . . .

"Has Mr. Massey gone?" Fanny asked.

"He's going in a minute. I left him ringing up for his car. That sounds like it now."

The noise of a motor coming up the drive and halting before the front door was audible in the still air.

"I thought he'd have gone long ago. It's past four. Poor Emily! You must be worn out."

"I am rather tired," Miss Todd confessed.

"I don't wonder. I suppose he worried you over figures till your head's spinning, and found fault with you for everything."

"He—he was rather displeased about the bills. He thought they charged too much at the Woolpack."

"I put that right for you." Fanny's tone was sharp.

"Yes, but he seemed to think they over-charged after that. I mean, the second account."

Fanny's eyes closed. She yawned slightly.

"So sorry, dearest. It must be the warm day that makes me so sleepy. What did you say? The second account? Oh, well, it's paid, isn't it, and too late to worry?"

"I thought so, but Mr. Massey wanted to take up the matter."

"Very interfering!"

"Oh, no. He's my trustee."

"Still, does that give him the right to demand particulars of every half-penny you spend?"

Miss Todd felt her sympathies veering from Fanny to Mr. Massey. It was strange how already one drove her to defend the other.

"Of course not, but I'm unaccustomed to handling my own affairs yet, and Mr. Massey is perfectly right to try and prevent other people from cheating me."

"Is he going to do anything?"

Fanny's question was casual, seemingly uninterested, but Miss Todd knew that she awaited the answer with some measure of anxiety.

"Not at present. I told him that I thought it would be better, more dignified, to let the matter drop."

"How wise of you, dearest Emily!"

"He did want to make inquiries about Timmins."

"But what good would that do?"

"Well"—Miss Todd's eyes grew wistful—"we'd both like to know whether she's really married."

"And supposing she wasn't? You could hardly have her back, could you, particularly as you told me you'd practically arranged for Mary to

take her place?" How glibly Fanny had accustomed herself to the names of her staff, Miss Todd reflected. "I think you'd much better let sleeping dogs lie. I hope you told Mr. Massey that Timmins had given you notice and treated you very badly, insisting on leaving at once?"

"I know she gave me notice, but you suggested that it might be better not to get her to stay."

Her own boldness astounded Miss Todd. All the same it would do Fanny no harm to be told that it was really her interference which had ultimately parted Miss Todd and Timmins.

"Certainly I suggested it," Fanny spoke stiffly.

"Mr. Massey thought it rather—unnecessary."

"What business was it of his?"

"He'd known Timmins for years, all the time she was here. Of course he considered it very strange that she'd leave me so abruptly, even to be married."

"And, I take it, you blamed me because she did."

"Mr. Massey asked me—— I said you found fault with Timmins and she gave me notice, and you didn't think it advisable to ask her to withdraw it or even stay longer."

"I see. And through my machinations and interference you were left all alone, ill, in a strange hotel. I suppose that's the impression Mr. Massey was given."

Fanny's tone was sad, her face, uplifted to Miss Todd's, grieved, reproachful. Miss Todd felt conscience-stricken, uncomfortable, once more indubitably in the wrong. How did Fanny always, always manage to twist everything so that she was right and Miss Todd the one wholly and entirely to blame? In this case it seemed manifestly unfair. Fanny had, as Mr. Massey pointed out, interfered unwarrantably in the affair of Timmins. If Fanny had not blamed Timmins, accused her of neglecting Miss Todd, Timmins might not have lost her temper and announced her intention of leaving Miss Todd's service. Yet Fanny, who no doubt meant well, had brought about the catastrophe and now accused Miss Todd of giving Mr. Massey a wrong impression as regarded her part. Miss Todd had tried to justify her own actions in Mr. Massey's eyes, but he blamed her as well as Fanny. Now Fanny was quite prepared to be injured, offended, suspicious, to resent Miss Todd having talked over the incident with Mr. Massey. Between the two Miss Todd felt very badly used. Timmins had let her down. It was unfair, unjust to imply that she had been overreached by Fanny and might have acted differently.

"Oh, no," she protested weakly. "I told Mr. Massey how more than good you were to me."

"I'm glad to hear that. I was afraid he was given the idea that I deprived you of the services of your valued maid, and you were left without anybody to take her place."

The words were dry, sneering. Miss Todd winced.

"Oh, no," she repeated desperately. "And you didn't take Timmins' place, Fanny. You looked after me most kindly, but—but not as my maid."

"Please don't try to differentiate between us, Emily. I'm perfectly well aware how inadequate a substitute you must have found me for anybody like her."

"You were most kind. I shall never forget it."

"There's nothing to gush about."

Poor Miss Todd, snubbed, miserable, embarrassed, and unhappy, stood looking down on her friend. Fanny's expression was not conciliatory. Her mouth had closed tightly. A spot of colour tinged either cheek. As a rule she was rather sallow, but Miss Todd was later to learn that those flushes betokened temper, anger, annoyance, and Fanny vexed, angered, annoyed, was not pleasant to deal with. . . .

Mercifully the appearance of Taylor cut short the tension.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am. I didn't know where you were. I was looking for you to tell you that tea is ready."

"Thank you, Taylor. Shall we come, Fanny?"

"Yes, dearest. Where are you having tea? In the drawing-room, or that cool, delightful morning-room?"

"I thought it would be nice in the garden, under the copper beech."

"Now, where is that? On one of the lawns?"

"Yes. At the side of the house. It's shady, and really one has to take advantage of every fine day in this uncertain climate."

Fanny laughed easily and stood up.

"I think you're fortunate in your weather as well as in everything else, you dear thing."

"Oh, no, Fanny. I'm sure you brought the fine weather with you."

Fanny gave Miss Todd's arm a playful nip and then took it affectionately.

"You're always planning pleasant surprises for me, Emily. Tea out will be charming."

"I'm sure, when you see how nice it is under the copper beech, that you'll wish you'd been sitting there since lunch, instead of in this stuffy walk."

"Oh, no, dear. I was perfectly happy here. I had a lovely nap, and nobody to disturb me."

"Well, if I'd known, I should have insisted on finding you a more comfortable spot. There isn't a breath of air, and though it's early for the waps the nasty things always seem to discover this corner."

"I didn't notice any. There was a bee in and out of that big Canterbury bell, but I enjoyed watching him." Fanny laughed again. "Now that I'm such a drone myself it's rather fun to look on at other people working."

"You're not a drone, Fanny. I should call you very busy as a rule. At the Woolpack you were always doing things for me."

"That was different, dearest Emily. I look on this as my holiday."

"So it is."

Miss Todd spoke eagerly, thankful to see Fanny apparently restored to her usual placid normality. Of course Fanny had a queer temper, but the only way was to avoid rousing it by tactlessness or invidious comparisons. Arm-in-arm the two friends made their way to the far side of the house. It cast a deep square of shade across the lawn, and beyond this the outspread arms of a mighty copper beech made another oasis of coolness. Near at hand sloped a many-coloured bed of mixed flowers. A great bumble-bee, with a conspicuous orange base, was investigating with purposeful thoroughness the enamelled rose and white of the antirrhinums. Taylor had placed comfortable chairs, complete with cushions and footstools, and set out a

tea-table, flanked by a cake-stand containing a variety of cakes and scones. Fanny sank into one of the chairs with a sigh of satisfaction.

"How lovely! I think I shall take your advice and sit here in future."

"Do."

Miss Todd spoke with corresponding enthusiasm and apparent approval, but once more her spirits had sunk. That 'in future' had held an ominous ring.

"I wish Mr. Massey could have stayed," she remarked irrelevantly. "Cream?"

"Just a drop. Oh, not all that, please, Emily."

"I've only given you a little. Won't you try those scones?"

"Thank you. Home-made?"

"Oh, yes. I think Mrs. Crabbie does all the baking."

"Think?"

"I—I don't know. She likes trying recipes."

"But, Emily——"

"What is it, Fanny?"

"Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Crabbie gives you the impression that she bakes everything herself?"

"She—she doesn't 'give me the impression'. I'm sure she does. One can easily tell the difference between home-made and bought stuff. At least Papa always said so."

Fanny inquired instantly: "Is there a baker's here?"

"Only a tiny little shop, but their bread's quite nice. They have small brown loaves that I always get when Mr. Massey is coming to tea."

"And these scones? They're extremely good, but I shouldn't have thought they were home-made."

Miss Todd took a piece of bread-and-butter and folded it in half with careful precision.

"Really, I don't know, Fanny. Mrs. Crabbie understands that a certain amount of cakes and scones will be wanted every day, and—and I suppose she provides them."

"That's exactly the point, Emily. I don't want to find fault with your housekeeping methods, but——"

"Mrs. Crabbie's the housekeeper." Miss Todd laughed shakily. "I'm only a figurehead."

"And she, I'm certain, realizes it. Really, Emily!"

Miss Todd asked with humorous despair: "Well, Fanny, what have I done now?"

"You've put it into Mrs. Crabbie's hands to be thoroughly dishonest. There's nothing to prevent the woman from pretending that she's done the baking herself, using flour and eggs and sugar and currants and baking-powder, and charging for them in her accounts. How do you manage about accounts, by the way?"

"They—they're paid monthly."

"Checked?"

"I—I don't know. Mr. Massey looks over them."

"I dare say he does, but he wouldn't be able to look into every separate item. And you'd never bother."

"Why should I? I'm certain Mrs. Crabbie's quite honest."

"And I think it's very doubtful, only you're so trusting. The woman just takes advantage of it. I could swear that she buys a lot of things and implies that she made them and lets you pay for materials she never used."

"Oh, that's absurd. What would she do with them?"

"I don't pretend to know. She could sell them or give them away. It's like your gardener and the vegetables."

"But Grier doesn't——"

"Do you know that he has never sold fruit or vegetables behind your back?"

"I don't actually know, but I'm certain he wouldn't, any more than Mrs. Crabbie."

Fanny ate plum-cake in ominous silence.

"It's dreadful to have you suggesting such things. Now I shall always wonder if Mrs. Crabbie and Grier are—are dishonest."

"You oughtn't to wonder. You should find out."

"How?"

"Your housekeeper must give you an exact account of her expenditure every week. You can check it, and if you find any irregularities, you'll speak to her about them."

"I—I couldn't. And I've no head for figures, Fanny, or any idea what things cost, or how much ought to be used. I shouldn't know whether Mrs. Crabbie had—had misused my confidence."

"Well, Emily, it may be because you've always enjoyed ample means that you think being cheated doesn't matter, but look at the principle of the thing. Mrs. Crabbie mayn't be here indefinitely. Supposing she left, would you recommend her as strictly honest?"

"Of course I should. I've never found her anything else."

"That isn't the point. If she left, she would take another situation, and as she hasn't been found out she'd employ the same methods, in all probability."

Miss Todd thought drearily of Mr. Massey's warnings about the Woolpack. She had, he considered, been overcharged and exploited, and unless she brought the offenders to book other people might be treated similarly. Now Fanny was accusing Mrs. Crabbie of dishonesty, and not merely hinting, but declaring openly that she would use the same ways of benefiting herself at her future employer's expense unless Miss Todd stopped such practices.

She hedged weakly. "But Mrs. Crabbie isn't leaving."

"You ought not to keep anybody in your service who is unfit to be trusted."

"I do trust her. I've—I've no reason not to. Until you suggested it, I hadn't any idea that she might—— That she was in a position to——"

"To feather her own nest? I should say she had ideal opportunities for doing so."

"But I couldn't argue over every halfpenny. And if Mrs. Crabbie got the idea that I wasn't satisfied, that I suspected her of—of what you think, she'd be furious."

"In that case, get rid of her."

"Oh, no, no. After all these years—— She promised Papa that she would never leave me."

"And I dare say Timmins promised the same."

Miss Todd felt herself on the verge of tears. How unfortunate, how unpleasant that Fanny had taken this unfair prejudice against Mrs. Crabbie! Of course she was vexed because Miss Todd had stupidly let slip that Mrs. Crabbie had practically advised her mistress to get rid of Fanny, but it was too bad that Fanny seemed determined to put Miss Todd in the position of investigating Mrs. Crabbie's administration of the household affairs, and if dissatisfied with this either to part with Mrs. Crabbie or goad her into giving notice. It might be the business of Timmins all over again. Why did Fanny strive so subtly, yet so forcibly, to part Miss Todd from anybody who served her? At this rate she would soon have none of her old staff left.

"I want Mrs. Crabbie to stay," she protested faintly. "She suits me, and in a village like this I mightn't find it so easy to get anyone equally suitable."

"You'd get plenty. I could tell you of somebody this minute who'd be only too delighted to take her place."

Fanny was arch again. She looked across at Miss Todd, laughter parting her lips. Unwarily Miss Todd asked: "What do you mean?"

"Why, myself, dearest Emily. I'd engage to run the house twice as economically as Mrs. Crabbie does, and with fewer servants."

"Oh, but—— I don't know that I'd like that."

"You'd find it answered very well. We could send Rose away, and Taylor and the new maid who's to take Mary's place could manage the rest of the work."

Miss Todd felt aghast at Fanny's cool planning of her household. Send Rose away! Expect a woman engaged as her own personal attendant to undertake a parlourmaid's duties in addition to her own! Dismiss Mrs. Crabbie, or allow her to give notice, and instead install Fanny, permitting her absolute authority over stores, domestic expenditure, the staff, Miss Todd's *ménage*! She might be a weak fool, but she was certainly not minded to allow this.

"You're joking, dear. It's a very funny suggestion, but I'm sure it wouldn't work." Her voice shook. "Besides, at present, anyway, the post isn't vacant. Mrs. Crabbie's here, and—and I am perfectly satisfied with the way she carries out her duties. Please don't say anything against her in future."

"Very well, Emily."

Fanny's tone was smooth, her acquiescence instant, but her eyes shot Miss Todd a curious look. It made her shiver. You poor fool, it seemed to say. I'll drop the subject for the present, but just you wait. You haven't got rid of me, and I'm not going until I've secured what I came for.

As plainly as though Fanny had uttered the words aloud Miss Todd could hear her saying them. It was a very hot, still day, but her body felt cold. Fanny suddenly became evil, a menace, a fetter upon Miss Todd's whole future. The only thing—her brain sought wildly for a city of refuge—was to speed her departure as swiftly as was compatible with ordinary politeness, and as long as Fanny remained at the Croft to be as little alone with her as possible. She must ring up friends, invite them to lunch or dinner, take Fanny into Market Batnors, accept invitations which included her guest, plan excursions or amusements. These opportunities for confidential talks,

questioning, investigations into Miss Todd's household arrangements and private affairs were too dangerous. Fanny had her at her mercy all the time.

A third person in the house? Mr. Massey had suggested it. That might solve the problem somewhat. He had proposed that Miss Todd should invite Mrs. Lawley. Well, why not? She would be present at meals, in the drawing-room in the evenings, sitting with Miss Todd and Fanny under the copper beech, ready to support Miss Todd if Fanny became interfering or presuming. Privately Miss Todd resolved to write to her old friend that very night and beg her to pay the Croft a prolonged visit immediately. Fanny need know nothing until Mrs. Lawley's arrival was imminent.

Taylor was coming across the lawn. Miss Todd looked up with relief as the maid's trim form approached.

"Mrs. Karslake has called, ma'am. I've put her in the drawing-room."

"Thank you, Taylor. Will you excuse me a moment, Fanny?"

"Certainly, dearest Emily. But why shouldn't Taylor bring your friend out here?"

Miss Todd had intended to suggest Mrs. Karslake joining her and her guest in the garden, but she resented Fanny's cool proposal that Taylor was to arrange this. Speaking stiffly, she said that she would go to Mrs. Karslake and if the latter had not had tea Taylor might bring a fresh supply. Taylor murmured: "Yes, ma'am," and followed Miss Todd at a respectful distance. At the corner of the house Miss Todd turned and glanced back. Up to the previous day the gardens had spread wide and empty, her possession, her own property, but now Fanny's figure, watchful, malign, sat installed, brooding, a menace, ready to remain, to squeeze Miss Todd dry, to hold her, body and soul, in the hollow of her hand. Again Miss Todd felt cold, although out of the shade the sun blazed down so hotly that she was obliged to shield her eyes.

Mrs. Karslake, the local doctor's wife, was a pretty woman anywhere between twenty-three and thirty-five. As she had said to Fanny, Miss Todd always remembered with gratitude Dr. Karslake's kindness during her father's long, trying illness, and his wife was one of her few friends. They kissed affectionately now.

"Dear Emily! So you're back?"

"Yes. Last night. How did you hear?"

"The doctor met Mr. Massey and he told him. Directly I heard I thought I must run up for a peep at you. How are you? You look thinner, not a bit as though your change had done you good."

"Oh, I was ill, you know, and there were worries—— It'll be all right now that I'm home. Have you had tea, Sybil?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Well, then, suppose we come out to the garden? It's really cooler than in here, and I have a visitor."

"I'm so glad. Bob and I hated to think of your being all alone. Is it Mrs. Lawley?"

"No. I am hoping she may come to me, but this is a friend I brought back with me from Derriford."

"I see."

Mrs. Karslake and Miss Todd went out to the garden.

Taylor had brought an additional chair. Miss Todd murmured that Mrs. Karlake had had tea and she might take away the tray. Fanny was alert and smiling. Miss Todd introduced her old and her new friends to one another. The three ladies sat down and Mrs. Karlake commenced a polite conversation with Fanny Anderson.

"And so you and Emily met at Derriford?"

"Yes. Do you know it?"

Why should a swift recollection flash across Miss Todd's mind of Fanny's face, the look in her eyes, wary, watchful, apprehensive, when she herself had mentioned that it was Mr. Massey who recommended Derriford as a holiday resort? Directly Miss Todd explained that Mr. Massey had merely spoken from hearsay relief showed plainly in Fanny's aspect. It was the same now. She seemed to be waiting, her anxiety ill-concealed, for Mrs. Karlake's reply.

"Not at all, but I've seen pictures of it. Isn't there a very beautiful old cathedral?"

"Yes." Fanny turned to Miss Todd. "I forget whether you saw it, Emily, before your illness?"

"Timmins and I attended service there two or three times. Such a sweet-toned organ!"

Miss Todd wondered whether she should mention to Mrs. Karlake that Fanny's father had had some connection with Derriford cathedral, but decided against saying anything. Fanny might not like it. It was difficult—Miss Todd checked a small private sigh—to gauge beforehand what might or might not upset Fanny. Least said soonest mended. Fanny was smiling now, apparently relieved that Mrs. Karlake should boast no personal acquaintance with Derriford. She said carelessly:

"We really met some way out from the town. We both happened to be staying at the same hotel, and poor Emily caught a bad chill, and I was able to look after her a little. Wasn't that it, Emily?"

"Yes, indeed, dear. I can't tell you how kind Miss Anderson has been, Sybil."

"It was fortunate that you had somebody to act the Good Samaritan. But, Emily, what about Timmins?"

"Oh, she has left me."

"Left you? *Timmins!* My dear!"

"She was to be married. Emily very kindly let her go immediately." Fanny answered for her friend as Miss Todd remained silent.

"Timmins married? But she's—she's middle-aged," declared Mrs. Karlake. "I'm sure I hope she'll be happy, but it's a dreadful loss for you, Emily."

"I know."

"And who's the bridegroom?"

"He owns the hotel. His name's Bowles."

"Young?"

"Oh, no. Wouldn't you say that he was elderly, Fanny? I think I only saw him once or twice, but he didn't strike me as at all young, and he's a widower."

"It sounds quite suitable, a middle-aged romance." Mrs. Karlake laughed. "I must write and congratulate Timmins, and the doctor and I will certainly give her a wedding-present. What is her address?"

There was an awkward silence. Miss Todd did not speak. Fanny offered no information. Mrs. Karslake waited. Finally she said:

"I suppose it'll be this hotel you stayed at, Emily, as she's married the proprietor. Just give the name, will you, and I'll jot it down. I've no memory. Isn't that unfortunate for a doctor's wife, Miss Anderson?"

"It is rather, as I expect you have messages to take and the telephone to answer."

Mrs. Karslake produced a small morocco-covered book from her handbag and sat with pencil poised over a virgin page.

"Yes, Emily? 'Mrs. Bowles.' Now, the address."

"I'm not sure——" stammered Miss Todd.

"You're not sure of the name of the hotel? But, my dear Emily, when you stayed there——"

"I didn't mean that. I meant—I meant that I wasn't sure whether Timmins is married," gulped Miss Todd.

"Oh, not married yet? Then where is she? If I wrote to the hotel wouldn't the letter be forwarded?"

Miss Todd felt on the brink of shedding tears. With Fanny sitting by, cool, watchful, ready to contradict or twist anything Miss Todd might say, she knew herself incapable of unfolding the whole story to Mrs. Karslake. Sybil would only blame her, as Mr. Massey had done. She remained silent.

"Or if I write here, can't you send it on?"

"I—can t."

"But, Emily——"

Mrs. Karslake sat regarding her friend in utter perplexity. What was wrong?

"Fanny?" moaned Miss Todd.

"Yes, dearest Emily? Now, don't upset yourself. I'll explain to Mrs. Karslake," Fanny cooed.

"I'm sure I don't know what's happened." Mrs. Karslake laughed uncomfortably. "First of all you tell me, Emily, that Timmins is married, then that she isn't, and finally you don't even seem to know where she is."

"I—— I—— Oh, dear! Fanny will tell you."

"Emily has been ill." Fanny spoke smoothly, unemotionally. "She had a trying time, and I don't think she's really recovered yet. Her heart——"

Miss Todd made a small, irritated movement in her chair.

"She doesn't like it talked of, but I think she ought to be careful. She gets breathless when she hurries and finds stairs trying. I know"—Fanny laughed elfishly—"that she'll tell you I'm imagining it and her heart's perfectly sound, but I want her to take care."

"That's very wise of you."

"Yes. And don't you see that all the bother over Timmins couldn't have happened at a worse time? To desert poor Emily when she was really ill, and in a strange place, in a hotel, not even with friends—— Well, I think it retarded Emily's recovery considerably."

"But did Timmins desert Miss Todd?"

Sybil doesn't like Fanny calling me Emily. She thinks it's too familiar for a mere hotel acquaintance, reflected Miss Todd wretchedly. How can I help it? She told me to call her Fanny.

"I consider that she did, Mrs. Karlake. She declared that this man Bowles was going to marry her, and she gave notice."

"And left?"

"And left immediately."

"Leaving Emily ill—in bed, I suppose?—with no maid to look after her? Oh!"

"Yes."

"Well, I call that simply disgraceful." Mrs. Karlake spoke with heat. "I don't know what the doctor will say. We both thought so much of Timmins."

"I know. She helped to nurse poor Papa, and Dr. Karlake always said how devoted she was." Miss Todd sighed.

"Apparently her devotion didn't extend to you. And your father remembered her in his will, and she was here long before I married and came to Little Batnors." Mrs. Karlake's anger against the absent Timmins mounted steadily. "How have you managed without her, Emily?"

"Oh, Miss Anderson came to the rescue. She did a great deal for me."

"And Timmins never offered to wait till you were convalescent? She just—went?"

Miss Todd nodded dumbly.

"It's inexplicable. Then you've no idea where she is? Has this man married her?"

"That's—that's the dreadful part of it, Sybil. I don't know. I hope he has, but—but I don't know."

"Didn't she write to anybody here and explain about her plans? She and your Mrs. Crabbie were great friends."

"Mrs. Crabbie hasn't heard. She said this morning that she was very hurt because Timmins hadn't written to her."

"You oughtn't to have let her go, Emily."

"Now, Mrs. Karlake, why? Timmins was a middle-aged woman, a free agent, perfectly at liberty to please herself. Why should Emily have lowered her dignity by begging her to stay?" Fanny spoke rapidly, her eyes flashing.

"Timmins was Miss Todd's maid, Miss Anderson, not yours. I was speaking to her, not you, and asking why she parted with her without making any effort to keep an old and valued servant, almost a friend. Wasn't she, Emily?"

"Yes. I was so fond of Timmins. It hurt me dreadfully that she wanted to leave."

"How could Emily have stood in the way when Timmins was going to be married? It was not like taking another situation."

"I am perfectly aware of that, but the point seems to be: is she married? Emily, you say that you don't know?"

"No. No, I don't."

"Well, can't you find out?"

"But— How?"

"Write to the hotel, to this man Bowles. If he says he knows nothing about her that shows that something was wrong." Mrs. Karlake jerked her chair nearer to Miss Todd's, almost ostentatiously excluding Fanny from her remarks. "I think you ought to do that. Why can't you?"

Miss Todd remained sunk in helpless silence. Oh, why did not Fanny go away? Already—Miss Todd could see it and flinched from the knowledge—she and Mrs. Karslake were prepared to dislike one another. If Fanny would only retire into the house, leaving herself and Mrs. Karslake, old friends, alone together, Miss Todd might be able to relate the whole miserable story. Alas! Fanny had plainly no intention of departing from the scene. She would sit there, wary, aggressive, ready to thrust her explanations, her comments, her contradictions into the conversation, and Miss Todd was defenceless, unable to remove herself and Mrs. Karslake. It was too bad, too tactless of Fanny.

Fanny answered. Miss Todd knew that she would.

"I don't think Emily cares to have any communication with this hotel, Mrs. Karslake. There was—not exactly unpleasantness, but they rather overcharged her, taking advantage of her having been ill, and it was very disagreeable for her, questioning certain items in the bill, and getting them to reduce it."

"Yes, I see."

"Of course she could write, but it mightn't do any good. The man would probably not answer."

"Well, if I were Miss Todd I should at least give him the chance." Mrs. Karslake shrugged her shoulders. "If he has married Timmins he would certainly be only too glad for her old friends to hear about it."

"Yes, Sybil."

"I'll write down the hotel. It can't do any harm. My husband might suggest some means of getting in touch with Timmins. What is the name, Emily? 'The Woolpack Inn, Flodbury, near Derriford.' Thank you."

Miss Todd had given the address mechanically, for her eyes were fixed, fascinated, on Fanny's hands. They were clenched tightly, as though only by strong compulsion had she restrained herself from snatching the note-book on Mrs. Karslake's knee and tearing out the leaf across which the names were written. Why? What concern was it of Fanny's whether Mrs. Karslake or anybody communicated with Mr. Bowles in the attempt to ascertain what had become of Timmins?

"And now let's talk of something else." The note-book was safely stowed away in Mrs. Karslake's bag. "Have you heard from Mrs. Lawley lately?"

"I wrote to her for Emily this morning," Fanny put in.

"Indeed? And since when have you set up a private secretary, my dear Emily?"

"Oh, Fanny's not—— I was a little tired and she very kindly offered to write instead. I knew that Mrs. Lawley would like to hear I was home."

"Isn't she coming to stay with you? The doctor suggested it before you went away."

"Yes. I don't know. She may come later. There's—there's nothing settled."

"You didn't give me any message of that kind to put in the letter, dearest Emily."

"No. I hadn't thought about it. We've plenty of time, the whole summer."

"And I think one visitor's quite enough for you at present. Don't you, Mrs. Karslake?"

"I should certainly say that you were quite enough for Miss Todd, Miss Anderson."

The words might have been playful or deliberately insulting. Miss Todd sat rigid with apprehension. How would Fanny take them? How would she react? It was not very nice of Sybil, but Miss Todd could tell that she was thoroughly annoyed by Fanny—Fanny's continued presence, Fanny's interference, Fanny's glib and effusive explanations and excuses. There was a grim silence.

"Major Blackwood's away," Mrs. Karslake told Miss Todd.

"He generally goes about this time."

"A holiday will do him good. He's let the house for two months—people with children. I hope they won't knock it to pieces."

"Have you any?" Fanny asked sweetly.

"One boy. He's at boarding-school."

Mrs. Karslake answered Fanny briefly and then, as before, deliberately addressed her conversation to Miss Todd. She talked of people and events, both local in character, unknown to Fanny, and Miss Todd's nervous or monosyllabic replies did not daunt her. Once when Miss Todd, in desperation, appealed to Fanny for her opinion, Mrs. Karslake drawled:

"Oh, don't bother to ask Miss Anderson, my dear. She won't know what we're talking about."

"I'm afraid it's very dull for you, Fanny." Miss Todd smiled weakly, deprecatingly, apologetically, placatingly.

"Not at all, dearest Emily. I'm interested in anything that interests you, and of course provincial people always like to gossip together about petty little happenings when they meet after one of them has been from home."

It was horrid of Fanny, Miss Todd decided, but Sybil Karslake had rather invited the snub, the undisguised inference that she was a doctor's wife in a small country place, with narrow interests and few outlets. Miss Todd did not resent being included in the classification, though it made her very uncomfortable that her old friend and her new one should already be at daggers drawn. Of course if Fanny had excused herself gracefully and gone away, as she might easily have done, as, in fact, she most certainly ought to have done, Miss Todd could have told Mrs. Karslake the whole story of Timmins and asked her advice. This was impossible in Fanny's presence. She felt irritated, jarred, weary, and longed for nothing so much as an early dinner and a retirement to bed soon afterwards. Fervently she hoped that Fanny would not want to sit up, talking and questioning and cross-examining and fault-finding and trying to pick a quarrel. . . .

"Heavens! Is that the time?" Mrs. Karslake glanced at her watch and rose. "I'd no idea it had got so late. Oh, Emily, I promised the doctor that I'd ring up with a message for Mrs. Garth. Might I do it here instead of waiting till I get home?"

"Of course, dear, only I thought Mrs. Garth——"

The pressure of Mrs. Karslake's foot on Miss Todd's under the tea-table prevented the latter from completing her sentence. She had intended to say that Mrs. Garth was away from home, but perhaps she had returned during Miss Todd's own absence. Or possibly Sybil considered it unpro-

professional to add anything further concerning a patient of Dr. Karlake's. Certainly Sybil should use the Croft telephone.

"You'll excuse us, Fanny?"

"Yes, dearest Emily, but why tire yourself? Can't I take Mrs. Karlake into the house?"

"No, thank you." Mrs. Karlake spoke with abrupt determination. "Good-bye, Miss Anderson. I hope it will be as fine for the rest of your visit. Come along, Emily."

A firm arm through her own wheeled Miss Todd about and marched her off in the midst of an apologetic mumble to Fanny.

"Faugh!" ejaculated Mrs. Karlake.

"I beg your pardon?"

"What a dreadful woman!"

"Mrs. Garth?"

"Nonsense! You know quite well I meant that Anderson harpy."

"Fanny? Oh!"

"Mrs. Garth's away, as you were just going to say when fortunately I stopped you. I had to make an excuse to get you to myself. Talk about limpets! Who on earth is this Fanny Anderson, Emily, and how did she manage to get in with you like this?"

"Oh, I—— We met at—at the inn. She looked after me when Timmins left."

"I'm perfectly certain she had something to do with that. I can't stop to go into it now, but the very first opportunity we get you must tell me everything."

"I did tell you."

"You gave me the bare facts, assisted by interpolations and interruptions and explanations from that Anderson woman. I want the true story."

"You've had it, really, Sybil. Timmins gave notice and said she was going to marry this Mr. Bowles."

"And Miss Anderson suggested taking her place?"

"She looked after me. I couldn't have been alone."

"No; but if Timmins really deserted you in that ungrateful fashion why did you not write or telegraph to Mr. Massey, or let old friends like us know? Between the three of us we could have arranged something."

"I—managed, thank you."

"And brought Miss Anderson back with you?"

"She's here as my guest."

"For how long?"

"I—I don't know, Sybil."

"H'm."

Miss Todd demanded despairingly: "Why do you say 'h'm'?"

"I might say a good deal more."

"But, Sybil—— She's all right."

"How much do you know about her?"

"There's nothing to know. Fanny's an orphan, a clergyman's daughter."

"Indeed? I presume she told you that."

"But it's true."

Mrs. Karlake laughed. The laugh managed to express a good many things: disbelief in Fanny Anderson's veracity, contempt for Miss Todd's

gross credulity, and open surprise that she could be so easily taken in. Miss Todd flushed angrily. Really, everybody combined to make her out a fool. First Mrs. Crabbie, with her doubts and mounting dislike of Fanny, next Mr. Massey, who openly mistrusted her, and now Sybil Karlake, who on a first meeting imagined and implied that Fanny was an adventuress, entangling Miss Todd in her toils, and it was only true kindness to open her eyes before it became too late. Naturally Sybil was annoyed because Fanny, rather tactlessly, Miss Todd admitted to herself, had not made some excuse to leave the caller with her old friend, but that was no reason for trying to prejudice Miss Todd against her new acquaintance and guest.

"My dear Emily"—Mrs. Karlake was no longer laughing—"I do implore you to be careful."

"But why? Careful against whom?"

"That woman."

"I don't understand you."

Miss Todd spoke coldly. They were standing just below the front-door steps, out of sight of Fanny, but Miss Todd knew that Mrs. Karlake referred to her.

"You understand perfectly well what I mean. I'm going to be frank, Emily. Miss Anderson's dangerous."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"She is. I know the type. What was she doing when you came across her?"

"Doing? Nothing. She happened to be staying at that hotel—the Woolpack—when I was. You heard her say so."

"And she introduced herself, managed to get in with you there?"

"It wasn't any question of 'getting in with me'." Miss Todd's face burned. How annoying Sybil was! Just because she happened to be a friend of some years' standing, the wife of Papa's doctor (now that Miss Todd recollected, Papa had never cared particularly for Sybil. 'Too bossy, my dear, by half. Runs the practice, or thinks she does. I wonder Karlake stands it'), it did not entitle her to select or criticize Miss Todd's other acquaintances. Probably she was jealous. With Mr. Massey it had been different. He was her trustee and as such in a position to see that Miss Todd did not act foolishly, but Sybil Karlake—I won't be managed by her, reflected Miss Todd angrily. Just because she's married and I'm not. It's too bad of her to dislike poor Fanny the very first time they meet.

"Well, what else was it?" Mrs. Karlake asked coolly. "Somehow or other she succeeded in parting you and Timmins, ingratiated herself with you to the extent of forcing you to invite her here, and I tell you plainly, Emily, my dear, you'll have no end of a job getting rid of her."

"Fanny was exceedingly kind. You don't understand, Sybil, how awful it was being ill in a strange place, not a soul to care, or to do a thing for me—"

"You had Timmins."

"Only at first, and directly she thought there was a chance of marrying she—she neglected me shamefully."

"So Miss Anderson rubbed it in, I imagine."

"There was no necessity to 'rub it in'. What a vulgar expression, Sybil!"

"Sorry, but you can't be too thin-skinned in dealing with a creature like her."

"Timmins?"

"No—Miss Anderson."

"Sybil, that's horrid of you."

"Oh, Emily, do be sensible. Don't you see what an old man of the sea you've saddled yourself with?"

"No. I invited Fanny here because I wished to make some little repayment for all her kindness to me at Derriford."

"What did she do?"

"I've already told you. She nursed me, and was most kind and attentive. I could hardly offer her money or a present in return. It seemed the best thing for us to travel back together, and naturally I suggested that she should be my guest for a while."

"If it were only a short visit—— You say you didn't name any special time?"

"No—but Fanny won't remain indefinitely. She—she'd have no excuse to. In a week or ten days, or a fortnight at the outside, I'm sure she'll suggest leaving."

"Has she a home or relations or anywhere to go?"

"No. She said she wanted to find something—some post."

"And in the meantime she digs herself in here. I see. H'm."

"Sybil, do stop saying that."

"What does Mr. Massey think?"

"About what?"

"Miss Anderson, the Timmins affair, your having the woman here, the whole thing."

"He came to lunch to-day and met Fanny. We had a business talk afterwards. He was dissatisfied about Timmins and thought I ought to make some inquiries as to whether she was really married, but I don't feel obliged to. I consider that Timmins has been most ungrateful and unkind. She ought to write to me."

"You don't know what Miss Anderson mayn't have said to her. It's my belief she interfered to such an extent that Timmins was simply driven to give notice in self-defence."

"Oh, Fanny didn't. She thought—she said to me that Timmins was neglectful, and so she was. You don't seem to remember that I was ill, everything strange, and for Timmins to desert me in the middle of it was the last straw. Why should I bother about her? She never troubled her head about me once she left." Miss Todd's sense of injury mounted. "She didn't come to see me or even inquire how I was. I might have died for all she cared."

Set against Fanny's devotion, the care and trouble Fanny had taken for an entire stranger, Timmins' indifference and callousness did indeed seem abominable. Miss Todd told herself that she had not realized their extent until this moment. And here was Sybil, excusing Timmins, blaming Fanny, inclined to censure Miss Todd, in short, to side with Mr. Massey and to think that Miss Todd ought to communicate with Timmins. She was not going to. Fanny would not approve. It was Miss Todd's own affair and no concern of Sybil Karslake's. Besides, how could she write to Timmins when she did not know where the woman was?

"Did you ask if she'd ever come to inquire?" Mrs. Karslake demanded.

"No—but they'd have told me if she had."

"Miss Anderson might easily have suppressed any message. She could have said to Timmins that you were too ill to see her."

"But why should Fanny do such a dreadful thing?"

"She wasn't going to run the risk of Timmins coming back."

"But Timmins was to marry Mr. Bowles. She said so."

"I don't believe she has. Miss Anderson got rid of her and ingratiated herself with you. Oh, Emily, don't let her get hold of you any further!"

Sybil sounded really concerned. There were actually tears in her eyes. For a second Miss Todd was minded to fling herself on Mrs. Karslake's mercy, to unbosom herself of the miserable complications and embarrassments which had arisen since she had brought Fanny Anderson to the Croft, but as her lips parted to speak footsteps and a voice sounded just behind her. Fanny had come up, an anxious expression on her face.

"Emily dearest, I hope you haven't been standing all this time? I thought Mrs. Karslake had done her telephoning and gone home long ago, and you were perhaps resting. Standing's so bad for you."

"Mrs. Karslake's just going," stammered Miss Todd.

"Good-bye, Emily. I'll see you soon, I hope."

"Yes, Sybil. Do ring up. Good-bye."

They parted, kissing as usual, but Miss Todd winced from Mrs. Karslake's final whisper. "Careful." Careful of what? Fanny? How unfortunate that Fanny should have appeared and found herself and Sybil in close conversation! She might suspect that they were discussing her.

"Well, of all the inconsiderate creatures!" Fanny sounded really vexed. "And a doctor's wife, too! Poor Emily!"

"I don't understand, Fanny. Sybil's not inconsiderate. It's natural that we should have a good deal to say to one another the first time we meet after I'm home."

"Well, why couldn't she have gone into the house and let you sit down?"

"It wasn't worth while. We were only talking here for a few minutes."

"I thought she wanted to telephone."

"Oh! Oh, yes."

"Did she pay you for the call?"

"Pay me?"

"Certainly. If you use another person's telephone it's customary to pay for the privilege. I always do."

"Sybil didn't 'phone. It wasn't important, I suppose——"

"A doctor's message to one of his patients not important?"

"She—she remembered afterwards that Mrs. Garth was from home."

"I don't believe she had any message at all. She made that up as an excuse to get you away from me. Now, Emily——"

Miss Todd was trembling from head to foot.

"Didn't that woman—Mrs. Karslake—ask you all sorts of things: how we met, who I was, what did you know about me? You can't deny it."

"She—she only wanted to know how we had become friends, Fanny. I told her just what you did, that we met at Derriford, and when I was ill you'd been most kind." Miss Todd mustered a sickly smile. "You were

too modest to say much about it yourself, but I gave Sybil to understand that no one could have done more for me than you, and I was a complete stranger, so that made it additionally wonderful."

"My dear Emily!"

"It's quite true, Fanny. I'm—I'm very grateful."

"I don't like her," Fanny pronounced sternly.

"Sybil? Oh, she's a dear, really. And Papa was greatly attached to Dr. Karslake."

"As well as to his wife?"

Miss Todd flushed and hesitated.

"I don't think Papa cared quite so much for Sybil. He considered her inclined to manage things. Papa hated a managing woman."

As she spoke the thought flashed across Miss Todd's mind that Papa would not have cared for Fanny herself. Fanny was exceedingly managing.

"What a wise man your father must have been, dearest Emily! So far-seeing and intuitive! He saw through Mrs. Karslake."

"Papa saw through Sybil?"

"Yes. He realized that she was a boss. Such a detestable type! It wouldn't surprise me in the least to hear that she has her husband—unfortunate man!—completely under her thumb."

Fanny paused. Miss Todd admitted obligingly that Little Batnors thought Mrs. Karslake did manage the doctor. "But she's a splendid wife. Keeps him up to time—he's rather forgetful—and takes down messages, and drives him about. She's wonderful, I think."

"My dear, I know the type. Don't trouble to sing her praises any further. A managing, possessive, domineering, bullying creature, far too circumscribed in her activities, and consequently obliged to boss and run other people, and not allow them to call their souls their own. I'm sure she's tried that on you."

"Sybil's very kind. She's never wanted me to do anything against my own inclinations."

"But she'll suggest and advise and hint, and if you don't give in she'll either be offended at her opinion not being taken, or tell everybody how stiff-necked and foolish you are. I know."

Miss Todd was beginning to find Fanny's omniscience somewhat trying.

"There's nothing to boss me about," she objected faintly.

"She wasn't satisfied with that wretched business of Timmins and her marriage. What concern is it of hers? Why should she get the address from you and write to Timmins?"

"Dr. Karslake is Timmins' doctor, and Sybil has known her ever since she married and came to Little Batnors. She's quite fond of her. Of course she wants to be certain that she's all right."

"Why shouldn't she be?"

"I don't know. But it's funny the way she's never written or troubled about me when I was ill."

"Well, doesn't that just show that she didn't care in the least for you?"

"It looks like it, only—— I wondered—— Sybil suggested—— That is, I was thinking that Timmins might have come to inquire and—and been told that I wasn't well enough to see her."

"Told by me, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, no, dear. The hotel people—Mrs. Roper, or Mr. Bowles, or that elderly woman. I forget her name."

"I'm sure Mrs. Karslake didn't suggest that any of them kept Timmins from seeing you."

Fanny's voice was edged with venom. Miss Todd trembled afresh. Oh, for a means of escape! Fanny blamed Sybil for keeping Miss Todd standing, yet she was doing it herself, leaning over against her on the step, pressing her back into the right-hand pillar by the hall door, her eyes glaring. What did she mean?

"Did she?"

"No, dear."

"Then she hinted that I did."

"Oh, Fanny, don't be absurd! As though you would!"

"I believe you think I did. That Karslake creature put the idea into your head, anyway."

Miss Todd could only reiterate that Fanny was entirely mistaken.

"Well, I hope so, but it's very peculiar, Emily, that you should suddenly suspect that I was trying to keep you and Timmins apart. Such a wicked, dreadful idea would never have entered your mind I know, only a spiteful, interfering woman like that doctor's wife insinuates it, and I feel it very much that you seem only too ready to believe her."

Miss Todd wept feebly.

"I was very distressed by Timmins' ingratitude to you. If she had shown the smallest desire to apologize and withdraw her notice I should have advised you to accept it, but she never did. I think you were well rid of her."

Dazed, bewildered, Miss Todd had neither the energy nor the wits to remind Fanny that it was she who had almost driven Miss Todd into accepting Timmins' resignation, pointed out repeatedly that it would be the height of folly to stoop to ask her to return or remain, and who all along insisted that it was not worth while to keep her when she was shortly to be married. Miss Todd looked entreatingly at Fanny.

"You couldn't have done that, I'm certain. It's only that I can't understand Timmins' desertion of me. I did think she might have tried to find out whether I'd recovered and gone home, or if I was still there, but—but she never did."

"Poor Emily! It's very hard I know to find oneself utterly mistaken and deceived in a person. You must try to forget all about her."

"I hope Sybil will write to her. I'd like to hear if she learns anything."

"Oh, she'll tell you, but I don't believe Timmins will answer. She ought to be too ashamed. Now, shall we come in and get ready for dinner? It must be long past six."

Fanny spoke, Miss Todd realized dazedly, as though she were the mistress of the house and Miss Todd her guest.

The evening threatened to be extremely trying. Fanny on her high horse; Fanny injured, affronted, delivering malicious gibes at the unfortunate Sybil Karslake; Fanny exhibiting the affair of Timmins in a light which revealed irrevocably that Timmins was entirely to blame and Miss Todd also in only a lesser degree—how could Miss Todd bear it? The little respite before dinner when Mary brushed her hair and answered in brief,

respectful sentences Miss Todd's nervous, half-abstracted remarks was soothing, but all too short. As the mellow-toned gong sounded through the house Miss Todd hurried out of her room. Mrs. Crabbie, as she had explained to Fanny, disliked her employer not to appear to the minute for a meal.

Had Fanny been right and was Mrs. Crabbie inclined to tyrannize? After all, the Croft was not her house. Deliberately Miss Todd lingered in the corridor outside her door. Taylor beat a second summons on the gong. Very slowly Miss Todd descended the stairs and went towards the drawing-room. She smiled at Taylor as she passed her, but Taylor's face wore a sullen expression and before restoring the gong-stick to its place she gave the old beaten copper gong a final whack.

"Don't make so much noise, please, Taylor."

The voice was Fanny's. She had come out of the drawing-room, wearing the brown velvet dress and the string of amber Miss Todd had given her. A playful gesture indicated the ornament. Miss Todd nodded nervously. It was nice of Fanny to wear the beads and to draw the donor's attention to them, but was it credible that she had addressed Taylor thus?

"I beg your pardon, miss?" Taylor stared aggressively at Fanny.

"I asked you not to make so much noise. It's quite unnecessary to sound the gong so vigorously or to go on sounding it at all. Miss Todd and I are both here."

"Yes, miss, only Miss Emily hadn't come down when the gong first went, and I thought perhaps she hadn't heard and wouldn't know dinner was ready."

"I heard all right, Taylor, but I didn't hurry."

"How sensible of you, dearest Emily. I see you're going to take better care of yourself." Fanny beamed approvingly at Miss Todd.

"Oh, yes. Are you ready, Fanny? I didn't mean to leave you in the drawing-room all by yourself, only——"

"Please, ma'am, shall I serve dinner?"

The interruption came from Mrs. Crabbie. She had just made a majestic entrance from the kitchen premises. Her aspect was one of outraged sensibilities and offended pride. Miss Todd wilted visibly.

"Oh, yes, if you please, Mrs. Crabbie. We're quite ready."

"I supposed you would be, ma'am, and Taylor sounded the gong as all preparations had been made and I presumed that you *and* Miss Anderson"—a vitriolic glare included Fanny—"were downstairs."

"Yes. Oh, yes. I came at once, directly I heard it, but I thought—— Miss Anderson advised me not to run up or downstairs, so I took a little time coming down."

"And very rightly." Fanny slipped her arm through Miss Todd's. "I only hope that noisy gong didn't startle you?"

"I'm quite used to it, Fanny."

"It made me jump." Fanny looked fixedly at Taylor. "Is it necessary to sound it before every meal, dearest Emily?"

"The gong's always been sounded, miss, ever since I came here." Mrs. Crabbie answered for her bewildered mistress. "My late master, Mr. Todd, wished it as he was somewhat deaf and liked to be informed when a meal was ready."

"Well, I'm not deaf and neither is Miss Todd. I think in future, Mrs.

Crabbie, the gong might either be sounded more quietly or a bell rung."

"Am I to understand that those are your wishes, ma'am?"

"I—I suppose so, Mrs. Crabbie. I hadn't bothered about it before, but the gong was really for Papa's benefit, so we might use something else."

"Very good, ma'am."

"There's a charming little cow-bell in the morning-room. Couldn't we have that?"

We! And Fanny had given orders for the gong to be discontinued. Miss Todd felt too tired to argue, to object, to assert herself.

"I suppose so," she answered mechanically.

"Thank you, ma'am."

Mrs. Crabbie withdrew. Her back, that upright, rigid, deeply annoyed spine, appalled Miss Todd. It would never do if she were to take offence. After dinner Miss Todd must go downstairs, explain that Fanny had not meant to interfere, but perhaps the gong was unnecessary now. Surely Mrs. Crabbie would understand? It was absurd to continue to run the house exactly on the same lines as in dear Papa's lifetime.

"I'm quite hungry," Fanny announced gleefully.

Miss Todd was not. She felt as though food would choke her. "That's very nice," she murmured automatically.

Rose and Taylor were both standing by the massive sideboard in their immaculate black, with starched aprons and old-fashioned caps. Miss Todd took her usual seat. Fanny was opposite. She waited. Nothing happened. Puzzled, Miss Todd looked towards the service lift. No dishes appeared.

"Why is dinner not come up, Taylor?" she asked. "I thought everything was ready."

"Mrs. Crabbie said it was, ma'am."

Fanny Anderson smiled.

"I'm so sorry, dear. I can't understand this delay."

"It doesn't matter in the least, Emily."

Five minutes later Miss Todd, nervously apprehensive, dispatched Rose to the kitchen to inquire into the cause of the non-arrival of the meal.

"It's extraordinary. Mrs. Crabbie's the soul of punctuality. Papa always said that you might set the clocks by her."

"It isn't as though Mr. Massey or anybody who mattered were here, dearest Emily. You mustn't make a stranger of me."

Fanny nodded reassuringly. Miss Todd crumbled her bread, feeling miserably uncomfortable.

Rose reappeared. Dinner was coming. She spoke sulkily and exchanged looks with Taylor. Miss Todd struggled with an inclination to burst into tears. What was the matter? Why was her household so subtly disorganized and rebellious? Could it be due to Fanny—Fanny who was admiring the roses in the middle of the table and tactfully drawing Miss Todd's attention to the sunset.

"It must be glorious at the other side of the house. Of course one doesn't see it so well from this window. We really ought to go out and look at it after dinner, Emily. Would it be too cold for you?"

"Not at all. The only things I don't like in the garden these evenings are the midges."

"Poor Emily! They always attack anybody with a nice white skin like yours."

The lift jerked into action. Rose took out the tureen and the soup-plates. The latter were cold; the soup luke-warm. Miss Todd said entreatingly to Fanny:

"Don't eat it, dear. I'm so sorry."

"Why? Mine's quite all right. This warm weather one doesn't want anything too hot."

Miss Todd choked down a couple more spoonfuls and then signalled feebly to Taylor to remove her plate. Fanny finished her soup with apparent enjoyment and aggravating leisure. Between mouthfuls she talked about gardens and asked Miss Todd if she found it possible to grow enough fruit for jam-making.

"I think so. Our jam's all home-made and I suppose the fruit comes from the garden. Mrs. Crabbie's damson curd is delicious."

"I saw some apricots in the greenhouse. They make very good jam."

"Yes—or you can stew them."

Fanny agreed politely that stewing apricots was an admirable way to dispose of them. Did Emily care for black currants?

"I like black-currant jam."

"So do I. It rather reminds one of sore throats, though."

Taylor came forward and removed Fanny's empty soup-plate.

The fish had not appeared. Fanny reverted from jam to marmalade and inquired if Emily's cook made hers.

"Oh, yes. Papa would never touch bought marmalade."

"Of course the home-made is much nicer."

"I think so. Taylor, does Mrs. Crabbie know that we are ready?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm just waiting for her to send up the fish."

The fish arrived. It was filleted sole, but bore a strong resemblance to blotting-paper. The sauce was cold and tasteless. Miss Todd shuddered.

Fanny told an amusing story about angling. Miss Todd laughed and said that she must tell it to Mr. Massey who, as an angler, would appreciate it. Oh! Fanny exclaimed. Was Mr. Massey a fisherman?

"Yes. He's very keen and gets a day's sport whenever he can. Unfortunately he hasn't much time for it."

"Still, it's a nice form of relaxation."

Taylor removed the fish and Miss Todd's and Fanny's plates.

What would the next course consist of? Probably Mrs. Crabbie had prepared a duck and her own special apple-sauce. Miss Todd decided that she could fancy these, or perhaps it would be chicken? Mrs. Crabbie's roast chicken was a dream. Taylor set down a long flat dish before Miss Todd. Mince! The saddle of mutton which had appeared at lunch had been utilized. Mince, plain, unadorned, no rings of hard-boiled egg or snippets of toast to garnish its homeliness. True, there were new potatoes and young peas, but *mince*— Miss Todd could not understand it. Certainly she had given Mrs. Crabbie a free hand to choose the dinner, to serve what she wished, but Miss Todd always did and Mrs. Crabbie knew what her mistress liked. With a guest, too, Mrs. Crabbie ought to have been on her mettle, given both something novel and appetizing. Instead of that—mince.

"Can you eat mince, Fanny?" she asked desperately.

"Of course."

At least Fanny was behaving as though this were nothing out of the ordinary. Miss Todd blessed her.

The mince was very salt, with unexpected lumps at intervals. Miss Todd left hers and ate two minute potatoes and a spoonful of green peas. To her amazement Fanny requested a second helping.

"If it isn't greedy, dearest Emily. I'm ashamed to be so hungry, but I suppose it's all the fresh air I've had."

"Oh, I'm glad you—you like it."

"It's delicious. And the peas simply melt in one's mouth. Well, thank you. I might just have a few more."

The mince was removed. Stewed plums took its place. Miss Todd felt ripe for revolt. No pudding; not even fresh fruit. Those plums were bottled. It was too abominable of Mrs. Crabbie. If she must serve stewed fruit, why not a tart? Apparently there was a shortage of eggs as custard, which, Miss Todd's critical palate told her, had begun life in a packet, accompanied the plums. Fanny, still exuding tact, admired the little cut-glass goblets in which the unappetizing mixture was heaped. She ate the contents of two and disposed of a good-sized helping of plums. Miss Todd announced that she would wait for biscuits and cheese.

"You're eating nothing, Emily. I'm ashamed to go on when you won't have anything."

"I—I'm not hungry. As I said at lunch, the hot weather always takes away my appetite."

"Poor Emily!"

Fanny was determinedly bright and chatty. She carried on a conversation all about trifles, assisted by Miss Todd's faint interjections and depressed monosyllables. At least Mrs. Crabbie had been unable to interfere with the final course. The cheese was excellent and the biscuits varied and crisp. Mr. Massey's grapes reappeared, flanked by a large pineapple. Fanny declined either. Miss Todd played with a few grapes and wondered whether she dared face Mrs. Crabbie with remonstrance or rebuke. Perhaps tomorrow she might feel braver. It had been such a long, trying day, punctuated in retrospect with endless scenes of one kind or another. She felt bruised, battered, enfeebled, fatigued. It was no use trying to talk things over with Mrs. Crabbie whilst in this state. Mrs. Crabbie might be insolent, overbearing, or express her intention of leaving. That would not do, though if she were to continue to send up meals after the pattern of this dinner it might be as well to dispense with her services.

Do I need a housekeeper? Miss Todd's thoughts ran. I could quite easily find a good cook and do more myself. Fanny seems to think I don't act as mistress of the house, that I let Mrs. Crabbie have far too much of her own way. It didn't matter until to-night. I've never known her to behave like this before. Can Fanny have upset her by saying that about the gong? It was no business of hers, but it would be rather nice not to hear it booming and feel obliged to hurry to be in time for a meal.

After all, why should meals be so rigidly punctual? It was necessary in Papa's lifetime, Miss Todd mused, and I got into the way of never being late. It's different now. A new cook would probably agree to have meals at the hours I wish. I could never ask Mrs. Crabbie to alter those. I must just brace myself to talk it over with her in the morning, and if she's

tiresome or—or insolent—she can go. Fanny said I could easily replace her. . . .

“Shall we come into the drawing-room, Fanny? I’ve finished at last.”

“You needn’t say ‘at last’, dearest Emily. You’ve hardly eaten anything.”

Miss Todd smiled faintly and followed her guest.

The drawing-room felt cool, dim, restful. How nice to lean back in a deep chair, to close one’s eyes, perhaps to sleep a little after this exhausting day. Miss Todd sighed. Instead, she must sit upright, make conversation, endless, futile, with Fanny Anderson, pour out coffee, stay up until Fanny signified her willingness to go to bed. As she was about to take her place behind the low coffee-table Fanny forestalled her.

“I’ll pour out the coffee, dear. You look so tired.”

Miss Todd stood aghast. To be ousted from her position as hostess in this way, to delegate her duties with the coffee-pot to her guest—it was insupportable. She struggled to assert herself, but Fanny had deftly slipped into the high-backed chair and was calmly indicating to Taylor where to place the coffee-pot.

“You’d better bring me a holder or something. The handle’s rather hot.”

“Yes, miss.”

Miss Todd sat down limply. Fanny gave her her coffee-cup without reference to her tastes.

Fanny Anderson and Miss Todd drank coffee.

Shall I say anything about the dinner? puzzled Miss Todd. It might make too much of it, and in a way she seemed to find it quite eatable, but I don’t know. It was too bad of Mrs. Crabbie to send up such a meal. If I don’t speak to her about it she’ll think I didn’t mind, or was afraid to find fault, and on the other hand, if I do, and she’s disagreeable—— Oh, dear! How I hate rows and quarrels. I’m sure that that unpleasantness about Timmins had as much to do with making me ill as getting wet. . . .

“A penny for your thoughts, dearest Emily?” Fanny interjected brightly.

“Oh, I was only wondering whether I ought to say something to Mrs. Crabbie about the dinner she gave us to-night.”

“But why? What was wrong with it?”

Fanny’s tone sounded blandly puzzled. Her eyebrows were lifted in perplexed inquiry. Miss Todd felt a spasm of irritation. There was no need for Fanny to over-act the polite guest.

“My dear, you were very sweet to pretend that everything was as it should be, but I was ashamed to give you such a dreadful meal.”

“I think you exaggerate, Emily. I’m sorry you weren’t able to eat very much, but I enjoyed my dinner as you saw.” Fanny sighed gently. “Perhaps your standards are higher. Of course you aren’t accustomed to lodging-house cookery and the kind of meals they give people like me in a cheap boarding-house.”

“I’m accustomed to good food, properly prepared. What we had to-night was disgraceful—simply disgraceful. The soup was half cold, the fish uneatable, mince—the joint we had at lunch—served up anyway, and stewed fruit. There wasn’t a pudding, or cream, or a proper sauce with the fish, and now that I come to think of it she didn’t give us a savoury either.”

Miss Todd spoke in heated accents, urged on by her wrongs. Throughout

she had the impression, mainly gathered afterwards, that Fanny was watching her, weighing her up, wondering whether she could drive her skilfully in the direction Fanny herself wished. . . .

What a fool I was, reflected Miss Todd bitterly. I ought not to have discussed it with Fanny. I should have pretended that nothing was wrong, spoken privately to Mrs. Crabbie, and not let Fanny interfere. It was only the beginning of it, of course. She's interfered for thirty years.

She can't interfere any longer. Fanny's dead.

"Didn't she?" Fanny asked.

"No. It was most remiss of her."

"Had you ordered one, Emily?"

"No. But Mrs. Crabbie ought to have known. We had one the night before. Papa and I had a savoury always."

"I don't quite understand." Fanny frowned a little. "Please don't think me inquisitive, dearest, but how do you manage?"

"Manage?"

"Yes. What is your—your method with your housekeeper? Do you write out the menus and tell her exactly what you want for every meal, or do you talk it over together and adopt one another's suggestions?"

"Oh, no." Miss Todd laughed nervously.

"I see. You just give her your orders."

"I wouldn't dare to do that with Mrs. Crabbie. I—— Oh, I simply tell her to send in anything she likes. She knew Papa's tastes, and all through his illness and—and afterwards, since I've been alone, she just gives me whatever she prefers to cook for dinner. It's the same with lunch or breakfast."

"Then to-night—— She sent up that dinner on her own initiative?"

"Yes."

"You hadn't ordered any of it?"

"No. I expected it would be nice, like last night, but I was really appalled, especially as I had a guest."

Fanny blinked her eyelids non-committally.

"Shall you say anything to her?"

"That's just what's worrying me. I—I don't want to; but supposing I don't——"

"She'll just take advantage of your behaviour and do it again. Is that what you're afraid of?"

"Yes."

Miss Todd sighed. Her coffee had grown cold. She drank a little of it and then put down the cup.

"More?" Fanny asked.

"No, thank you. Fanny, what ought I to do?"

"Can't you consult Mr. Massey?"

"Oh, no. I never tell him anything about my domestic arrangements."

"You told him about Timmins."

"That was quite different. She was my personal maid and Mr. Massey had known her for years. Of course he had to hear the whole story, why she left, exactly what happened, and I wanted his advice about trying to get in touch with her."

"But Mrs. Crabbie?"

"I couldn't bother Mr. Massey with that. Besides, it would look too silly, to see whether he thought I ought to find fault with her about sending up an uneatable dinner."

"I don't think it was uneatable, but as you admit that you gave her a free hand—you always do—I suppose she felt herself entitled to give you anything she chose."

"I can't go into details like that with Mr. Massey."

"Well, what about Mrs. Karslake?"

"Sybil? Oh, it's—it's no business of hers."

"Then you'd better settle it yourself, dearest Emily."

"But how?"

"Do you really want my advice?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then—mind, Emily, I'm only making the suggestion. There isn't the slightest necessity for you to act upon it if you prefer not to—I should send for Mrs. Crabbie—don't go down to her—and ask her what explanation she can offer for giving you a dinner that was not up to the usual standard."

"And then?"

"Well, dear, isn't it up to her after that? She can apologize and promise that it shan't happen again, or she can take the line that she's going to have her own way in the matter of meals."

"But I can't— If she says that she didn't do anything, that the dinner was all right, how can I say anything more?"

"You must be firm. It's no use finding fault unless you're prepared to stand up for yourself."

"I tried doing that with Timmins and look what happened."

"The cases are entirely different. Mrs. Crabbie is not going to be married, is she?"

"No, of course not."

"Timmins only gave notice because she had Mr. Bowles in view. Mrs. Crabbie will think twice before throwing up a good situation like this one."

"Is it so good?"

"Emily! You ruin the woman. I don't know what wages she gets—it's no business of mine—but I imagine they are pretty extravagant. She's practically mistress of the house."

"Oh, no."

"I say she is. You admit that you don't give her orders. She arranges the meals, not you. And you told me that she was very strict about punctuality, that you daren't be late."

"I expect that may have upset her to-night. I didn't hurry when the gong went, and then we were talking in the hall. She was waiting to send up the soup."

"And took a petty revenge by giving it to you half-cold."

Miss Todd countered weakly: "You ate yours."

"Well, dearest, could I make my hostess uncomfortable by refusing it? I saw that you were upset, and as the other courses came——"

"They were disgraceful. How abominable of Mrs. Crabbie! So mean and petty! I'd never have thought she could behave like this."

"Then don't let her think she can do it again, Emily."

Fanny spoke gently, mildly, shaking her head in warning. Miss Todd clung to the sides of her chair.

"It'll be so unpleasant. I hate finding fault. Can't we leave it till the morning?"

"No. Much better to get it over to-night. If you say nothing Mrs. Crabbie will feel very triumphant and be planning to do the same over again. I wish you had taken a firm stand with her sooner."

"But there wasn't any necessity. She's never behaved like this before."

"Probably she had far too much freedom when you were at Derriford. It was very easy, the house empty, nothing to do, and directly you come back she starts having her own way, trying to save herself trouble, and if you just meekly put up with it you're in for a wretched time."

Fanny nodded aggressively. Miss Todd felt sick, miserable, wholly undecided.

"It's so late to start an unpleasantness."

"There need be none. All you have to do is to send for the woman, ask her quietly what she meant by giving you a dinner which you thought was uneatable, and whether she has any excuse."

"Yes, Fanny."

"You see, don't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Shall I ring? Then you needn't get up. In any case I'm going out of the room."

"Oh, Fanny, you mustn't. I—I can't face her alone."

"My dear Emily, this is too absurd. Your housekeeper—and you the mistress! Surely you aren't afraid of Mrs. Crabbie?"

"It's only—— She may be insolent, and I hate a—a row. It'll make me quite ill, I know."

"Of course it's not good for your heart." Fanny spoke meditatively. "Do you really want me to stay here, Emily?"

"Oh, yes, yes. You'll back me up if she's rude?"

"I don't imagine she's in any position to be that. She put herself entirely in the wrong. You're entitled to find fault, not Mrs. Crabbie to blame you."

Fanny rang the bell and then returned to her chair. Miss Todd sat in abject misery. Taylor appeared.

"Oh, Taylor, is Mrs. Crabbie busy?"

Fanny Anderson coughed slightly.

"I don't know, ma'am. Do you wish to speak to her?"

"If—if she isn't doing anything. You might ask her to come here."

"Yes, ma'am."

Taylor departed. Fanny hissed a reproachful "Emily!" at her friend.

"Oh, what, dear?"

"You mustn't be so meek and mild. The idea of giving that woman the opportunity of making a compliment of coming to speak to you!"

"It's only that the evenings are supposed to be her free time."

"It seems to me that she has hardly anything to do."

"I—I don't know. There's the cooking, of course, and the catering, and she arranges the other maids' work."

"All with an eye to saving herself trouble. Here she comes. Now, dearest Emily, I implore you to be *firm*."

Miss Todd, feeling like a half-paralysed rabbit buttressed between a weasel and a stoat, sat looking from Fanny to Mrs. Crabbie. The latter was the picture of prim respectability, but by her expression, the set of her shoulders, and her ominous silence Miss Todd gathered that she, not Mrs. Crabbie, was the culprit. Mrs. Crabbie did not offer her accustomed pleasant: "Well, ma'am?" She stood there, breathing resentment, outraged dignity, implacable anger, and sour determination. How was Miss Todd to open the appalling interview? She squeaked faintly:

"I—I wanted to speak to you, Mrs. Crabbie."

"So Taylor informed me, ma'am."

"About to-night's dinner," put in Fanny.

Mrs. Crabbie turned a majestic glare on the third party.

"I am perfectly willing to listen to anything you think it necessary to say to me, ma'am, but I consider that it would be more agreeable if you and I were by ourselves."

"Do you wish me to go away, Emily? I offered to."

"No. Please stay, Fanny. Mrs. Crabbie?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Why did you give us such a nasty dinner?"

"What, may I ask, ma'am, was wrong with it?"

"Everything." Miss Todd clutched at her rapidly evaporating courage. "The soup was lukewarm, the fish too, no proper pudding or a joint or poultry, and you didn't give us a savoury or any cream with the plums."

"I see, ma'am."

"It was too bad. I don't mind so much for myself, but to put such—such uneatable things before a visitor——"

"Miss Anderson has been complaining, then, ma'am?"

"No. She ate the dinner and pretended that there was nothing wrong. It was I who said to her that I was sorry she should have been obliged to do so."

"Indeed, ma'am?"

Mrs. Crabbie's brief interjection, her slight sniff seemed to bring Miss Todd's strictures to an end. She felt that she could say no more. Fanny murmured her name.

"I beg your pardon, Fanny?"

"You expect Mrs. Crabbie to give you some explanation, don't you?"

"She—she ought to."

"Explanation, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"Well, ma'am, I don't think that any explanation is required. I regret that the dinner was not what you anticipated, but I can't see that there was much wrong with it. If I may take the liberty of reminding you, you were late and delayed matters, and that's why the soup was perhaps not perfectly hot."

Miss Todd felt hopelessly counter-argued and out-manceuvred. Mrs. Crabbie had not merely declined to admit herself in the wrong. She had carried the war into the enemy's territory by declaring Miss Todd's unpunctuality to have been the cause of the opening course's imperfections.

Miss Todd was late. She could not deny it. Still, that hardly excused the other remaining foods having been so unappetizing. Helplessly she gazed from Mrs. Crabbie to Fanny. Fanny ought to support her. It was she who had advised Miss Todd to send for Mrs. Crabbie and demand that she ate humble pie. At Miss Todd's wish Fanny had remained in the room to stand by her friend. Why could not Fanny speak, deliver her from this dilemma, and rout Mrs. Crabbie, up to that moment indisputably the victor?

"It wasn't only the soup," Fanny announced.

"Indeed, miss?"

"You heard Miss Todd telling you that she considered the rest of the dinner very nearly uneatable."

"Is that so, miss?"

"And I think, as she says, that you ought to explain the reason. If she did happen to be a few minutes later than usual that's no excuse for you to send up cold soup."

"Ma'am?" Awful in her wrath, Mrs. Crabbie turned to Miss Todd.

"Yes, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"Is Miss Anderson speaking for herself or for you?"

"I—I don't know. I think she's right, though, in a way. Even although I was a little late you could have kept things hot, couldn't you?"

Mrs. Crabbie said nothing. Miss Todd subsided further back in her chair and wished herself dead. This was too dreadful.

"I could, ma'am," conceded Mrs. Crabbie graciously.

"Then why didn't you?" retorted Fanny Anderson.

Mrs. Crabbie did not deign to answer Fanny. She turned to Miss Todd again.

"I think, ma'am, that we could discuss this better if we were alone."

"I don't believe it would make any difference, Mrs. Crabbie. I found fault with the dinner, and you blamed my unpunctuality, but you haven't apologized or—or anything. What is there to discuss?"

Miss Todd felt unexpectedly valiant. Surely she had cornered Mrs. Crabbie? Then, suddenly, with devastating, appalling clearness, she saw the situation from Fanny's angle. It was Fanny who wanted her to dismiss Mrs. Crabbie. Failing that, she was to goad Mrs. Crabbie into giving notice. How easily both might have played into Fanny's hands! In the garden Fanny had bluntly suggested that Miss Todd should part with Mrs. Crabbie and allow Fanny to take her place. No, no, no! Better a thousand times spoilt dinners, insistence on rigid punctuality, a blind eye turned towards Mrs. Crabbie's possible manipulation of household goods and garden produce to her own advantage, than Fanny—Fanny in sole authority, Fanny driving away Mary, Taylor, and Rose, Miss Todd's sole links with her old life, Fanny triumphantly managing Miss Todd to the end of her days. Never!

She looked imploringly at Mrs. Crabbie. Suddenly they stood side by side, united against Fanny. Mrs. Crabbie said stiffly:

"Well, ma'am, I've said I'm sorry if the dinner wasn't to your liking. I shall do my best in future to give you what you wish."

"Thank you, Mrs. Crabbie, oh! thank you."

"Is that all for the present, ma'am?"

"Yes. I—I think so."

"Very good, ma'am."

Mrs. Crabbie inclined her head stiffly, ignored Fanny, and went out. Miss Todd watched the door shut and waited for the storm to break. . . .

"Most unsatisfactory," pronounced Fanny.

"Oh, no, dear. I—I was afraid at one time that she was going to make herself unpleasant, but it's all passed off quite well, hasn't it?"

"As long as you are satisfied I suppose I must be."

Fanny sounded aloof, offended. Miss Todd resumed awkwardly:

"But, Fanny—— What more could I have said?"

"You ought to have insisted on a proper apology."

"She—she said she was sorry."

"Words are cheap. She wasn't really."

"I'm sure things will be better in future. She must have seen I wasn't pleased."

"You let her off a great deal too easily. If you'd spoken plainly, told her that it must never occur again——"

"Then she'd have given notice."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I tried finding fault with Timmins—at least, you did—and look at the result."

"The cases are not parallel at all."

Fanny never would admit that she was in any way to blame for Timmins' defection and departure.

"They are, Fanny. In both instances you thought a servant of mine was not—not doing her work properly and ought to be spoken to, and when I did Timmins left and I'm pretty sure Mrs. Crabbie would have done the same, only——"

"Only—what?"

"I think she saw that you wanted her to go."

"My dear Emily, please be reasonable. What possible difference does it make to me whether your housekeeper goes or stays? You are the only person concerned. I'm just a guest, here for a short time. If you like to allow Mrs. Crabbie complete authority to boss and bully you I shan't interfere."

"I thought you said when we were in the garden that I might get rid of her and let you take her place."

"Well, I'd be quite willing, dearest Emily. It would be much more economical, for one thing."

"But there's no need to save money. I've plenty."

For a second Fanny's eyes gleamed oddly.

"Anybody can see that you have by the way you waste it."

"I don't. Mr. Massey would tell me directly if he thought I was being too extravagant."

"You said yourself that Mr. Massey never interfered with your domestic arrangements. He just saw about your investments and ordinary expenditure."

Miss Todd felt shaken by a spasm of helpless anger. How stupid she had been to give Fanny such intimate details of her affairs!

"You've let Mrs. Crabbie get the upper hand this time," Fanny pursued relentlessly. "Of course she'll take advantage of it. If you'd stood up for yourself she'd very soon have seen that she can't play that trick twice."

"What trick? Oh, about the dinner. But I'm sure she won't. She said that it would be all right in future."

"Will it?" Fanny sneered.

Miss Todd sat regarding her miserably. What more did Fanny want? Miss Todd would have preferred to pass over the incident of the spoiled dinner in silence, but Fanny had insisted on her sending for Mrs. Crabbie, complaining in detail about the meal, and in the end extracting a semi-apology and promise of amendment. Surely these should be sufficient? She groped for dignity and firmness.

"I don't think we need discuss it any further, Fanny. I apologized to you for obliging a guest to sit down to such a meal, and Mrs. Crabbie has promised that it will never occur again. It's all been most unpleasant, I'm sure, and I hope it's done with."

"Dearest Emily, I do wish you wouldn't worry. That's so bad for your heart."

"It is thumping in rather a queer way," confessed Miss Todd.

"Why not send for your doctor?"

"Dr. Karslake? Oh, there's no necessity. We'll both sit quietly and not bother to talk, shall we? And if we go to bed early I expect I'll be quite fresh and bright in the morning."

"I hope you will. Do you mind if I go on with my book?"

"Of course not. It's much more sensible than making polite conversation as though we were strangers instead of friends."

Miss Todd smiled happily and settled herself in an easier attitude in her chair. Her eyes closed. The room was very peaceful, scented with the candy-pink lupins in a tall glass by her elbow. Mentally she began to draft a letter to her old friend Mrs. Lawley. If she wrote to-night the letter would go out by the last clearance and Mrs. Lawley might receive it by the afternoon post. Miss Todd would beg her to come immediately and stay indefinitely. A third person present would prevent any more embarrassingly intimate talks with Fanny, talks in which, Miss Todd was beginning to realize, Fanny skilfully extracted from her details of her financial position and other private matters that were emphatically not her concern. If Fanny did not like Mrs. Lawley it could not be helped. Mr. Massey had suggested that Mrs. Lawley should be invited during Fanny's visit. Mrs. Crabbie and the other servants liked her. Unconsciously, Miss Todd was preparing to shelter herself behind Mrs. Lawley, reinforced and flanked by Mrs. Crabbie, Mary, Taylor, and Rose. Against Fanny? Nonsense! Fanny was a little tactless, inclined to be argumentative and to manage other people's affairs, but she meant well.

For thirty years now Miss Todd had tried to go on convincing herself that Fanny meant well. Undoubtedly she had—for Fanny Anderson.

Miss Todd yawned. That honey-scent from the lupins was a trifle heavy. She must not fall asleep in the drawing-room. How ill-bred! With an effort she hauled up her eyelids and looked over at Fanny. Fanny was reading. She sat upright, erect, holding her book at a proper angle. Fortunate Fanny not to require glasses! Miss Todd used them for reading or writing. Under her scrutiny Fanny glanced up, smiled, and laid down her book. Miss Todd smiled too.

"Is it interesting?" she asked.

"This book? Oh, I've read it before."

"Don't bother with it, then. Shall I find you something else?"

"No, thank you, dearest Emily."

"But why go on reading if it's something you've read already?"

"Well"—Fanny considered the question gravely—"I saw you were tired and didn't want to talk."

"We could both have nodded." Miss Todd laughed. "Don't read out of politeness, Fanny."

Fanny replaced the book on a marquetry table beside her chair.

"I'm only anxious you shouldn't feel obliged to entertain me."

"There's no question of that. When I invited you here I warned you that you'd find Little Batnors extremely dull."

"But it isn't as though I were a young girl, Emily, and required amusement or taking about. I'm glad of the peace and quiet. And you're tired and ought to rest as much as possible."

"I can't think why I'm yawning like this," Miss Todd confessed.

"I can tell you. It's because you're hungry."

"Hungry? Nonsense!"

"You ate no dinner, or hardly any."

"Oh, Fanny, please don't begin on that wretched dinner again. I want to forget all about it."

"And you haven't drunk your coffee. Didn't I give it to you the way you like it? I'm so sorry."

"I forgot and let it get cold. It doesn't matter."

"Emily?"

"Ma'am, as Mr. Massey says to me."

"Does he call you that? Like Queen Victoria. How quaint! Well, I was just going to suggest that you had something before you went to bed."

The proposal appalled Miss Todd.

"But, Fanny—I really don't want anything. And I never expect extras between meals. The maids wouldn't like it."

"The maids! Emily, it makes me furious the way you consider those wretched servants of yours."

"Papa always said that eating between meals was a very bad habit."

"He was perfectly right. (I wish I'd known your father. He must have been such a rock of sense.) I never advocate that, dearest Emily; but to-night, when you had such a poor dinner and that unpleasant scene afterwards, I think you require a little nourishment before going to bed. Do—just to please me. I'm so afraid you won't sleep if you're hungry all night."

"I—I might have milk and a biscuit."

"That isn't enough. I know. An omelette, and a glass of burgundy."

"But an omelette means cooking and preparing a tray, and I drank port this morning, Fanny. I mustn't get into the way of tippingling."

"Tippingling! One glass!"

"It was two."

"Very tiny glasses. And as for cooking and getting a tray ready—Aren't there four able-bodied women downstairs?"

"Yes, but the evening's their time off. I don't like to ring and order all that."

"Then I will."

Fanny rose, pealed the bell loudly and decidedly, and sat down again. Panic-stricken, Miss Todd panted:

"You must tell them—— I daren't. Oh, Fanny, I really don't want anything."

"Yes, you do, Emily. Anybody else but that stony-hearted, disagreeable, disoblising Mrs. Crabbie of yours would understand how empty and exhausted you must be feeling after hardly any dinner and putting up with her insolence."

"She wasn't——"

"Her manner was. And the least reparation she might make for her behaviour would be to ask whether you would like a little supper, but of course she's only anxious to save herself trouble."

"I—I don't think so, Fanny."

"I do. I call her downright heartless. She seemed to forget that you've been ill. You *need* building up. What a time they're taking to answer that bell!"

Taylor appeared. Fanny took command of the situation—Taylor, the meal, Miss Todd, the dinner in the background—with complete aplomb. She said firmly:

"Miss Todd ate very little at dinner, Taylor, and after her recent illness she requires to keep up her strength. Will you please tell Mrs. Crabbie to make an omelette? Herb or sweet, dearest Emily?"

"I—I don't mind."

"A herb one might be best. And bring some burgundy, Taylor."

"Are those your orders, ma'am?"

"If—if Mrs. Crabbie doesn't mind the trouble," bleated Miss Todd.

"I will tell her, ma'am."

Taylor walked out. Her very apron-strings seemed to bristle with disapprobation.

"What a disagreeable creature she is!" Fanny commented thoughtfully.

"I'm sure she's surprised and—and not at all pleased. It was so unexpected."

"Well, of course if you keep your servants for ornament, dearest Emily, and let them have as much spare time as they like, naturally they resent being asked to do the smallest extra thing. I only hope Mrs. Crabbie won't spoil the omelette out of spite."

Miss Todd sat trembling. How unpleasant all this was! When the said supper did arrive she felt certain that she would not be able to swallow a mouthful. How calm, how assured, how commanding Fanny had been! She issued orders to Taylor as though—— Well, really, she might have been Taylor's employer and the mistress of the house, not poor shattered Emily Todd.

"I wish you'd have something yourself, Fanny," she urged faintly.

"Certainly not, dear. I suppose I'll never convince you, but I had a quite adequate dinner."

"Well, you must join me in a glass of burgundy. I refuse to drink it alone."

"I'd really rather not, thank you. If we're going to have our port every morning, and you know you positively bullied me into agreeing to drink it if you did, wine once a day's quite enough for me."

"I won't eat my omelette unless you drink some burgundy."

"But I don't like ordering it for myself in another person's house."

"I'll order it."

"I wish you wouldn't insist, Emily."

"Oh, you must."

After an exceedingly long wait Taylor brought in a small tray. Mrs. Crabbie had produced an omelette of surpassing lightness and fluffiness. Fanny hovered over Miss Todd, coaxing playfully, doing everything but feed her, the unfortunate woman decided. The burgundy had not accompanied the omelette. Faintly Miss Todd requested Taylor to bring it and a couple of wine-glasses.

"Oh, and some biscuits, please, Taylor. Is there any particular kind you prefer, Fanny?"

"No, thank you, dear. Don't let your omelette get cold."

Miss Todd choked down the omelette in silent rebellion.

Taylor marched in with the burgundy. She set it down, waited for further orders, and when Miss Todd murmured that that would be all, marched out again. Fanny shook her head.

"Dearest Emily, don't you think——?"

"What?" snapped Miss Todd.

"That Taylor's manner is really rather disrespectful."

"I—didn't notice."

"Well, I thought it was. She came in so—so abruptly, and looked very sulky, I considered, and she had to be reminded of the burgundy."

"I knew she wouldn't be pleased at being asked to do anything extra just now."

"Anything extra! To carry up a tray with a dish she hadn't cooked, and she was told to bring burgundy!"

"You told her." Miss Todd's faint reminder had a ring of malice which surprised herself.

Fanny's eyes widened.

"It was you who asked me to give your maid her orders, dearest Emily. Otherwise I should never have dreamed——"

"No, no, of course not. I was really afraid to, and you very kindly did it instead. Won't you drink your burgundy, Fanny? Oh, she's forgotten to bring any biscuits."

"Has she?"

"How stupid of her! I'm very sorry."

"Oh, do you think it was stupidity?"

"Certainly. What else could it have been?"

Fanny sipped her burgundy deliberately. Her silence goaded Miss Todd to press the question.

"Wasn't it, Fanny?"

"I don't think so. I imagine she did it to be annoying."

"Does it matter very much? I mean—— You don't really mind drinking your burgundy without a biscuit, do you?"

"I don't mind, certainly"—Fanny deliberated over her answer—"but I think, as a matter of principle, Emily, you ought not to let it pass."

"But what can I do?"

"You can ring for Taylor, point out that she did not bring any biscuits, and tell her to do so now."

"It means dragging her all the way up from the kitchen a second time."

"What else is she paid for except to answer a bell when it's rung and carry out your orders?"

"I know. It sounds very silly, but—but I don't like to."

Miss Todd had eaten her omelette abstractedly and now sat gazing miserably at Fanny.

"Just as you please, of course, dearest Emily."

"I—I don't think it's worth while, Fanny. I've finished, and you've only a little more of your burgundy to drink—unless you'd like another glass?"

"No, thank you."

"Then we needn't bother. I'll ring presently and ask Taylor to take the tray away, and—and I might just remind her that I told her we'd like biscuits and she didn't bring any."

"That will only give her the opportunity to be insolent and say she won't take orders from me."

"Oh, I don't believe she'd say that. Taylor's always most respectful."

"She was anything but respectful just now, the way she positively bounced in and out of the room, and banged down the tray. Now, didn't she, Emily?"

"She did rather," Miss Todd admitted.

"I know she didn't say anything, but her manner—— She gave a sort of sniff—like this—and I'm sure she'd love to have slammed the door, only she wouldn't dare."

"I can't think what's come over them," wailed Miss Todd. "First Mrs. Crabbie, now Taylor, and I suppose it'll be Mary and Rose next."

"Why should it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I seem to have upset them all thoroughly, and I'm sure I never intended to."

"I dare say things will be better to-morrow. If you ask me——"

"Yes, dear?"

"I think they all got completely out of hand whilst you were away. There was nothing for them to do."

"They cleaned the house. Mrs. Crabbie said so."

"Yes; but if you investigated I expect you'd find a good deal had been neglected. There were no meals to prepare, except for themselves, and they could just take their own time, be in or out as they pleased, entertain their friends——"

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"At your expense?"

"It—it doesn't matter. I don't want to treat them like slaves, Fanny."

"You spoil and pamper and indulge them, and are afraid to say a word or even to give an order. It's too ridiculous."

"Well, directly I do assert myself the least bit just to—to please you, there are scenes and unpleasantness and I'm made thoroughly miserable."

"Because you've let that housekeeper of yours and those maids have their own way far too long. Naturally they resent having to exert themselves for a change."

"But if I assert myself, as you call it, they'll give notice—like Timmins."

"And if they did the world wouldn't collapse."

Fanny Anderson laughed.

(Are you laughing now, Fanny, wherever you are? I don't think so. Anyway, I'll never hear you laugh again—here.)

"I don't see anything amusing," mourned Miss Todd.

"I'm not laughing at you, dearest Emily. Heavens, no! But it is rather funny the way you cling to these maids and Mrs. Crabbie and won't contemplate the smallest change."

"I hate changes. You seem to forget that all of them have been here years, in my parents' lifetime, and are more friends than anything else. They're a—a link with Papa and Mamma, and so was Timmins. Oh, dear! I wish I knew what had become of her."

"Emily, please don't begin all over again about Timmins. You'll only upset yourself, and you know your heart——"

"I haven't got one. At least not in the way you mean."

"You said it was thumping in a peculiar fashion. That doesn't sound right. You ought to be careful and not let your servants worry you. It'll react on your heart. Oh, I know."

Fanny nodded. Miss Todd was beginning to hate Fanny's omniscient little nods. Why must Fanny always be right?

"Shan't I ring?" Fanny asked. "You don't want to sit looking at an empty plate, dearest."

"Thank you," muttered Miss Todd.

"And when Taylor comes, just tell her to take the tray away."

"You think I'd better not mention the biscuits, then?"

"It might only gratify her to know that you minded her not bringing them. No; I'd ignore it."

Fanny was talking about preserving ginger when Taylor came in.

"Of course some people don't like it that way. They say it makes it too sweet. Oh, I beg your pardon, Emily. Taylor wishes to speak to you, I think."

"Shall I take the tray away, ma'am?"

"Oh, yes, please, Taylor. Thank you. You might tell Mrs. Crabbie the omelette was delicious."

"Yes, ma'am."

The door shut behind Taylor, balancing the tray.

"Now, why did you say that, dearest?" Fanny demanded reproachfully.

"Why not? It was delicious, and I wanted Mrs. Crabbie to know that I appreciated her taking pains and giving me something extra at this hour."

"It's only part of her duties to feed you properly. But I suppose there's no use in my saying anything. You must manage your own affairs." Fanny rose with a light laugh. "Do you mind if I go out for a few minutes and look at that wonderful sunset?"

"Oh, no. Do. You said at dinner that we'd see it better from this side of the house. Shall I come too?"

"I think it might be wiser if you didn't venture. The dew—— I'm so afraid of your taking cold."

"Very well. But put on a coat or something, won't you?"

"There's no necessity. I shan't be long."

Fanny disappeared. Miss Todd closed her eyes and surrendered herself

to peace. Fanny seemed able to turn her tact on and off like a jet of water. Just at the moment she was being very, very tactful. Miss Todd had longed to be alone, but short of suggesting an adjournment to bed when it was barely nine o'clock she saw no way of securing even a short respite from Fanny's society. Now Fanny herself had secured it for her. Miss Todd felt extremely grateful. When Fanny came back she must be extra kind and friendly. Fanny really had tact. In another hour she might propose retiring for the night. How heartily Miss Todd would second this!

Again she dozed. The opening of the door roused her. She sat up sleepily as Fanny reappeared. "Was it very beautiful?" she asked.

"The sunset? I didn't notice." Fanny seemed purposeful and energetic. Miss Todd's spirits sank to zero. "Emily?"

"Yes, dear?"

"There's something I think I ought to tell you."

Fanny's tone, hollow and foreboding, held an ominous ring for Miss Todd's ears.

She asked apprehensively: "Must you?"

"I consider it my duty."

"If—if it's anything unpleasant I'd sooner not hear it."

"Dearest Emily, you mustn't mind my saying that you're a trifle prone to shrink from difficulties. One doesn't get through life by shirking, you know."

Miss Todd's heart recommenced its uneasy pounding.

"I'm not shirking, but you do rather find out things about people, Fanny, and insist on telling me of them. I'm sure I'd never have thought Timmins was neglectful or Mrs. Crabbie bossy or Taylor insolent if—if you hadn't said so."

"Oh, well, Emily, if you prefer to sit there and be robbed behind your back instead of lifting a finger to stop it—encouraging dishonesty, in short—I can't prevent you."

Fanny looked mournfully at her friend.

"Robbed?" squeaked Miss Todd.

"That's what I said."

"But—who's robbing me?"

"That gardener of yours—Grier."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"You can't deny the evidence of my eyes."

"What—what did you see?"

Fanny sat down near Miss Todd.

"You know I went out to look at the sunset? It wasn't cold, but I thought I'd better not stand about, so I strolled down the avenue. There's a little lodge at the end."

"Grier lives there with his mother. She opened the gate when we drove up from the station yesterday."

Yesterday, yesterday, or fifty years ago. Wasn't that a line from some poem? It could not be only yesterday that she and Fanny had arrived together.

"Oh, does he? Well, he was outside the gate with a barrow."

Miss Todd repeated dumbly: "A barrow?"

"Yes. Emily, it's disgraceful. It was simply piled with vegetables. And I saw at least two baskets of fruit."

"He—he may have been taking them to the cottage hospital. I told you Papa used to send them fruit and vegetables."

"In that case, why did another man come, wheel away the barrow, and give Grier money?"

"I—I don't know. Did you see him?"

"I saw the whole thing. I was behind some bushes."

Miss Todd, limp and bewildered, sat gazing at Fanny.

"What happened then?"

"Nothing. Grier pocketed the money and went into the lodge, and this other man wheeled the barrow away down the road. I watched him out of sight," Fanny explained conscientiously.

"There must be some excuse. Grier can't have sold those things."

"Of course he did. I dare say he's been doing it for years. Your father was an invalid and not able to keep an eye on him, and you're too s—— unsuspicious, I mean, to imagine that such a course of bare-faced robbery on the part of an old employee was possible. He's had every opportunity and just taken advantage of them."

From Fanny's tone, her attitude, her accusations, she positively enjoyed exposing Grier's delinquencies. Miss Todd trembled.

"I can't do anything," she wailed.

"You can. You must dismiss him."

"Dismiss *Grier*?"

"Certainly. Immediately. It's rather late to do it to-night, I suppose, but first thing to-morrow morning—no, after breakfast," Fanny conceded, "you ought to send for him, give him notice, without any wages, and order him to leave at once. If he dares to make any fuss, threaten him with prison."

"But I can't possibly—— Poor old Mrs. Grier—— She's had a stroke. How can I turn her out? And she's done nothing."

"I'm positive she knew all about it, if she didn't actually aid and abet him."

Fanny was again right, aggressively, terribly right. Miss Todd felt powerless. She could not believe Fanny's story. No doubt it was true that she had seen what she detailed, but there must be some explanation on Grier's part.

"I'll consult Mr. Massey," Miss Todd compromised faintly.

"I thought you said he never interfered with your household affairs."

"He doesn't, but this is different. It's quite beyond me to cope with it."

"Shall I do it for you? I'm perfectly willing."

"Oh, no, no, dear. I couldn't expose any guest to such dreadful unpleasantness."

"There need be none. I shall simply tell the man and his mother that their rampantly dishonest practices have been discovered and that they must take the consequences. Grier is very fortunate that you don't wish to prosecute. I suppose you do not, Emily?"

"No—no! A hundred times no!"

"Now, don't get excited and hysterical. There's nothing to be upset about."

"Nothing? You think that Grier's a thief and say I must dismiss him, and you call that nothing!"

"Well, it doesn't seem to me to be important enough for you to get into such a state. Do remember your heart, dearest."

"Grier's been here since he was a boy."

"Then it's all the more disgraceful of him to have abused your trust and confidence like this."

"You don't know that he has. I'm not going to send him away without letting him have the opportunity of explaining. Every criminal is allowed a hearing, Fanny."

"You're too lenient, Emily."

"No, I'm not. I'm only just."

"I dare say in the morning you'll see things differently and admit that I was right."

"I never said you weren't. I'm not denying that you saw what you described, but Grier ought to be let tell his story."

"And he'll get round you and promise not to do it again if only you'll keep him on. You're culpably weak, Emily, and the people you employ all know it and take advantage of it."

"Oh, I know I'm a fool."

"Emily!"

"I beg your pardon, Fanny, but you do try to make me out one."

"I think you're much too kind-hearted, dearest Emily, and you're imposed on by completely undeserving people. I never said you were a fool."

I was one, Miss Todd reflected drearily. Fanny saw it. She just exploited me every bit as much as the others she said were doing it. . . .

"Anyway, I can't do anything to-night. You said so."

"No, dearest. You'd much better go to bed, and in the morning——"

"I'll ring up Mr. Massey and ask his advice."

"He won't thank you—a busy lawyer—for bothering him in his business hours."

"He never minds. I—I couldn't take such a step as accusing Grier of theft and dismissing him without Mr. Massey's approval."

Fanny sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

"It's no use my saying I think you're far too much under his thumb, Emily."

Miss Todd felt likewise that it was no use. She looked appealingly at Fanny.

"Shall we go to bed? I know it's early, but——"

"I'm quite willing. I only hope you won't lie awake worrying. There's nothing to worry about, dearest Emily. All you have to do is to send for Grier to-morrow, tell him that he is dismissed without a character, and you ought to see that he leaves immediately."

"Yes, Fanny."

"Well, we'd better go up to bye-bye. You will try to sleep?"

Miss Todd promised briefly. Sleep! How could she close an eye having the menace of the morning's interview with Grier upon her? She did not disbelieve Fanny's tale, but Grier must be able to explain, to exculpate himself, to escape the stigma and disgrace of being dismissed as a thief. How would Papa have acted? Was Mr. Massey likely to support her or to side with Fanny? Had Fanny been right, and did she, Emily, rely too much on Mr. Massey's opinion and advice? If he thought that Grier should go he must take the responsibility and tell him to leave. How unfortunate

that the splendours of the sunset should have lured Fanny outside and Fate or chance or some other malign power had led her steps towards the lodge! A cold doubt teased Miss Todd. Had Fanny, nursing her earlier suspicions of Grier, deliberately gone in that direction in order to spy upon the gardener? It seemed impossible, but Fanny——

If Fanny eavesdropped, trying to overhear Miss Todd's conversations with Mr. Massey at the telephone and in the library, what further petty meannesses might she not stoop to as a channel of amassing useful information? I must lock up my letters, mused Miss Todd worriedly. And I think I'll take my address-book upstairs. I don't imagine for a moment that Fanny would make any use of it, but it might be wiser not to give her the chance.

What, in the slang phrase, was Fanny's game? Why had she discovered that all Miss Todd's employees were either dishonest, disobliging, 'diddling' her, as Papa would have phrased it, behind her back, and Fanny herself seemed apparently determined to drive Miss Todd into dismissing them? She could not do this. She must stand firm. Mr. Massey would have to support her. Miss Todd's harassed mind harboured the problem of how she was to see him alone, to talk to him in complete privacy, and to lay Fanny's discovery before him without Fanny being present to explain, interrupt, argue, or advise. If I rang him up now, soliloquized Miss Todd, I might at least tell him very briefly what has happened and see whether he could come over to-morrow. . . .

"Good night, Fanny. Are you quite sure that you have everything you want?"

"Oh, yes, dear, thank you. There are biscuits and chocolate by my bed, you thoughtful person, in case I felt hungry, but I'm certain I shan't be."

"I don't know about that." Miss Todd spoke mournfully. "I'm afraid you ate a poor dinner."

"Now, Emily, please don't begin going into that all over again." Fanny laughed playfully. "And you forget that I had burgundy."

"It isn't like food. Well, if you're all right—— Sleep well. Good night again."

"Good night, dearest Emily. Now, you're not to lie awake worrying about this stupid business with that wretched man. Put him out of your mind. Shall I come in and brush your hair?"

"Oh, no, thank you. Mary will be up directly."

"Very well, then."

Fanny disappeared into her room, nodding smilingly. Miss Todd backed into hers and drew a long breath of sheer relief. At least she was rid of Fanny's company for the next ten or twelve hours. Fanny could hardly find or invent any pretext for invading Miss Todd's bedroom. She wandered about, fidgeting with different articles, and wondering when Mary would appear. Perhaps Mary did not know that she and Fanny had gone upstairs. It was early.

Finally Miss Todd opened her door and peeped into the corridor. The slight sound, although she endeavoured to turn her door-handle noiselessly and to assume a mouse's tread, reached Fanny. Fanny had ears like a hare, Miss Todd realized ruefully. She called anxiously:

"Is anything the matter, dearest Emily? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Fanny. Do go to bed."

"Well, why don't you?"

"I'm waiting for Mary. She's never come up. I thought I'd just look out and see whether she's anywhere about."

"Ring for her. You ought to have done that at once."

Miss Todd glanced rather coldly at Fanny. Really, to be ordered about like this was too much.

"I think I'll wait a little longer. She'll be here any minute."

"And meantime you'll sit up and await her convenience. Oh, Emily!"

"I'm not in the least sleepy. Oh, there she is."

Mary was advancing along the corridor. She ignored Fanny, still hovering in the doorway of her room, and addressed her mistress.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. I didn't know that you'd gone upstairs. Are you ready for me now?"

"Yes, please, Mary. Fanny, I wish you'd go to bed."

"I'm not sleepy either. I think I'll just come in and sit with you while Mary brushes your hair. Hasn't Miss Todd beautiful hair, Mary? I used to brush it for her when she was ill, and I always envied her. It's so long and thick, dearest Emily."

Miss Todd felt completely helpless. How could she tell Fanny that she did not want her? The ordeal of having her hair brushed by Mary in grim, respectful silence whilst Fanny sat there, chattering easily, graciously including Mary by a remark or a query—— The prospect was unbearable, yet it could not be avoided, evaded, or postponed. She said weakly:

"You ought to be getting to sleep, Fanny. I mustn't keep you up."

"You won't, dear. I'm not at all tired. You forget that I had a lovely nap this afternoon all the time you were talking business with Mr. Massey. Poor Emily! Wasn't it a shame, Mary, to keep her indoors on such a fine afternoon, going over figures?"

Mary emitted a non-committal answer. Miss Todd subsided limply on to a square-topped embroidered stool before the dressing-table and let Mary commence operations. The tall mirror, with its side-wings, reflected her face, pale and anxious, Mary's grave countenance behind, and further off Fanny's profile. She began to talk at once, admiring Miss Todd's ebony-backed brushes and silver-topped bottles, playfully took a little scent out of one of the latter, and finally, to Miss Todd's utter dismay, seized the brush from Mary's hand.

"I'll finish your hair, dearest. Then we needn't keep Mary up. There's nothing more she has to do for you, is there?"

"No," acknowledged Miss Todd faintly.

"What a quantity of hair you have, Emily! Mine fell out one time I was ill and it never really grew properly again afterwards. I think Mary's waiting to go."

"Oh, yes. Good night, Mary. Thank you."

"Good night, ma'am. Will you ring if you require me?"

"Yes."

In the mirror she caught reflected, for a lightning second, Mary's expression of mingled pity and contempt. Oh, this was too much! To be commiserated by her own servants for her weak folly in submitting thus tamely, spiritlessly, to Fanny Anderson's tyranny! And yet—— It's all very well for Mary, raged Miss Todd inwardly. She can just go downstairs,

but I—— How could I refuse to let Fanny come in or prevent her from brushing my hair in place of Mary? I wish she'd stop brushing it. I wish she'd go. I wish—I wish she was dead!

This last unuttered aspiration shocked Miss Todd. How dreadful of her! Fanny only meant to be kind. Miss Todd had told her downstairs that she did not like asking the maids to do anything extra during the evenings, their free time. As yet Mary was not definitely established as Miss Todd's personal maid in the room of Timmins. Perhaps Fanny thought that Mary might resent being expected to brush Miss Todd's hair. Very tactfully she had probably prevented Mary from having any opportunity of complaining, declaring herself overworked, being kept standing. . . .

"Thank you so much, Fanny. I think that will do."

"I'll just plait it loosely. How prettily it grows! You don't need curling-pins with that nice natural wave."

Miss Todd laughed weakly.

"You won't hesitate to ring for Mary if you want anything, will you? I thought she looked rather sullen, as though she resented having to come upstairs now, away from the kitchen."

"Then why did you do her work for her? She understands she is to wait on me for the present."

Fanny sighed gently. The sigh seemed to imply that she was accustomed to be misunderstood.

"Well, Emily, I know you're worried enough as it is with that tiresome business about Grier. I thought it quite possible that you might say something to her, and she, of course, would take Grier's side."

"I don't discuss any of my servants with each other, Fanny."

"No, no, dear. Surely you didn't think I meant that?" Fanny tied a ribbon round the end of Miss Todd's neat plait of hair. "It's different with Mrs. Crabbie—she's your housekeeper and has so much authority—so naturally you talked over the Timmins affair with her this morning."

"Mrs. Crabbie and Timmins were great friends, both here so long. She wanted to know why Timmins left, and—and everything."

"Yes, dearest Emily. I do wish you wouldn't start worrying about her at this time of night."

"I wasn't worrying. It was you who mentioned her."

"I know it was. I'm afraid you thought me officious, taking Mary's place like that, but I wished to save you from a discussion with her that might upset you."

"I've told you already, Fanny, that I never discuss what concerns one of my employees with any of the rest."

Miss Todd's tone was cold. She rose with astonishing determination. Fanny pouted a little.

"If I didn't know what a sweet temper you have, dearest, I should think you were vexed with me."

"I'm not. No, I'm not, but everything's so horrible. Poor Grier! I can't believe it."

"Then you imply that I made up what I told you I saw?"

"Oh, Fanny, please"—Miss Todd thrust out imploring hands—"don't start an argument. Let's go to bed."

"Certainly. Only I must say, Emily, it's not pleasant to have one's word doubted."

Fanny sounded direly offended, but Miss Todd was too tired to propitiate or placate her.

"I didn't doubt it. What I meant was that of course you saw Grier and the barrow with vegetables——"

"And fruit."

"And fruit, and this other man taking it away after he had given Grier money, but I'm certain Grier will have some reason, some explanation to offer."

"Oh, I expect he will be very plausible and persuasive and implore you to overlook it, but I do beg, Emily, that you remain firm. If it's nothing else it's such a bad example to the other servants you think such paragons. If Grier can hoodwink you in that way (don't forget you've no idea how long this sort of thing has been going on), they may be up to all kinds of tricks."

"We needn't discuss the possibility of that now. I wish you wouldn't stand there. Do go to bed."

"You will, won't you?"

"Oh, yes."

The door shut after Fanny. Miss Todd sat down limply on the sofa at the foot of her bed. She must get in touch with Mr. Massey. How long was it likely to be before Fanny had completed the ritual of preparing for bed and was in hers and safely asleep? Miss Todd dared not go downstairs until then. She gave Fanny a margin and waited, restless, miserable, undecided, until her little bedside clock pointed to half-past ten. Did Mr. Massey retire early? Would he not think it strange of her to ring him up at such an hour? As a rule he was always the one who telephoned, and if Miss Todd had had a message from her father or there were any business to be gone into she rang up his office in the daytime. Of course he was an old friend, but should he think her unconventional, presuming——

It could not be helped. In a way the whole blame was Fanny Anderson's. If she had not been spying on Grier——

What a horrid word, yet, somehow, the right one. Fanny must have spied. She admitted herself lurking behind bushes, unseen by Grier, and watching all he did. How could Miss Todd tell first Mr. Massey and later Grier that her guest, her friend, had spied on another person's gardener? It sounded too dreadful. Would Mr. Massey applaud Fanny's action and insist, with her, on Grier's dismissal? Had Miss Todd the courage to defy both? Was Fanny in bed? Dared Miss Todd leave her room and slip downstairs to the library? Fearfully she gathered her dressing-gown about her and tiptoed to the door. It swung open noiselessly, despite the trembling of her hand. Everything outside was very still. Even Fanny could not complain that Mrs. Crabbie and the maids sat up late. Probably they had gone to their rooms and were asleep. Miss Todd pattered downstairs. The hall and library were ghostly. She felt her way over to the telephone, switched on a reading-lamp nearby, and rang up Mr. Massey's house. Her heart thudded. Fanny would tell her how bad it was to over-excite herself like this. Would he have gone to bed? A voice was speaking, saying hello. She panted: "It's Miss Todd, the Croft."

"Oh, yes, madam." With a gasp of thankfulness Miss Todd recognized the respectful accents of Mr. Massey's impeccable cook-housekeeper. "Good evening. Do you wish to speak to the master?"

"I—— I—— Could I, please, Mrs. Simmons? He isn't in bed?"

"No, madam. I think he's reading. Will you kindly hold the line and I will tell him."

"Yes. Thank you."

To Miss Todd's terrified fancy as she waited, clutching the telephone receiver in one damp hand, hours passed. Then she heard the familiar, reassuring, suave voice. "Good evening, Miss Emily."

"Good evening. Oh, Mr. Massey!"

"Yes? I trust there is nothing wrong?"

"There is, I'm afraid. I can't very well explain here. I'm keeping you up."

"Not at all. It isn't late. Would you like me to come over?"

"It's—it's very good of you, but not to-night, please. Could you come to-morrow—early?"

"Certainly. Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"It's very kind of you. I'll expect you then."

"Yes, ma'am." In duty bound Miss Todd laughed feebly, as Mr. Massey anticipated. "I hope—— Has it to do with Miss Anderson?"

Miss Todd pretended to misunderstand.

"Ten o'clock, you said? Thank you so much. I feel ashamed, ringing you up at this hour——"

"Emily!"

The receiver slid from Miss Todd's limp, nerveless grasp. The instrument rocked. As she stood paralysed Fanny stepped to her side, caught the stand, and deftly restored the telephone to its base. Miss Todd could not utter a word. She stood there, perfectly aware that she presented a ludicrous figure in her wadded silk dressing-gown, her grey hair neatly plaited, her feet covered by heelless quilted slippers. Fanny, she noted dazedly, was not undressed, nor had her hair been released from its neat daytime coiffure.

"I—— I—— Oh, Fanny!"

"My head ached," Fanny explained. Was the explanation a shade too glib? "I knocked at your door to ask for a little of your delicious eau-de-Cologne, but there was no answer. Then I saw that the door wasn't shut, so I looked in, and you were not there. I was afraid you might be ill. I came downstairs directly I heard your voice and found you here."

"I was only telephoning."

"At this hour?"

"It's not really late. I wanted to try and get Mr. Massey before he went to his office in the morning. He's promised to come round to-morrow and see me."

"Why didn't you tell me, dearest Emily? I could so easily have rung up for you and arranged everything. I thought we'd settled to do nothing until next day."

Fanny's tone, her reproachful look, instantly convicted Miss Todd of slyness, an underhand method of dealing with her affairs when she had agreed with Fanny on a different course of action. Miss Todd wilted. The library felt remote, spectral, semi-dark, as Fanny, in restoring the telephone's equilibrium, had, accidentally or otherwise, switched off the lamp. She and Fanny were alone, Fanny annoyed, suspicious, mistrustful, and Miss Todd badly frightened and flustered. What might not Fanny do to her, say to her, or extract from her in the way of promises or agreement? A childish

desire seized her to thrust Fanny aside, to run out of the room, to gain the sanctuary of her own bedroom and there turn the key. As she hesitated, her eyes glancing wildly from Fanny to the distant door, the telephone rang sharply, peremptorily. Fanny had hung up the receiver, abruptly terminating Miss Todd's conversation with Mr. Massey. What would he think? Was he ringing up, imagining that she had fainted or was otherwise prevented from continuing their talk? Mechanically she moved forward, but Fanny forestalled her. She took down the receiver.

"Yes? No, this is Miss Anderson speaking. Do you wish to speak to Miss Todd? She's in the room. Emily dearest, Mr. Massey is here. Will you speak to him?"

Miss Todd obeyed. She was very sorry. The receiver had slipped. Stupidly she had given the telephone a knock and nearly upset it. Miss Anderson had rung off, thinking that she had finished. No, she was quite all right, thank you. Mr. Massey wouldn't forget that he had promised to come round at ten? It was very good of him.

"I beg your pardon. Oh, you would like to speak to Miss Anderson? Fanny, Mr. Massey wants to speak to you."

Was it imagination, or did Fanny approach the instrument unwillingly? Her "Yes, Mr. Massey?" sounded bland, controlled, untroubled, accommodating, but the tight set of her mouth directly after showed Miss Todd that Fanny was not pleased. The one-sided conversation which Miss Todd, retreating to the far end of the room, could not fail to hear, perplexed her further.

"No, you're quite mistaken. She's not ill or anything. Something happened to upset her and she wanted to ring you up. I beg your pardon? No. I came down. I couldn't think why she wasn't in her room. The light isn't very good. Emily only put on one lamp and I think she knocked against the 'phone accidentally. Of course I know what she wants to see you about, in fact it was I who discovered the whole thing. I thought it my duty to tell Emily—— Oh, just as you like, Mr. Massey. You'd better ask her yourself. Emily!"

Miss Todd approached the telephone. That last peremptory summons of Fanny's sounded as though she were calling a dog. Fanny said briefly: "Mr. Massey wants to speak to you *again*."

Trembling, Miss Todd stammered into the receiver that she was present and correct.

"Miss Emily, I am not at all satisfied. If not inconveniencing you very greatly I propose that we do not defer our discussion until to-morrow. Might I come over immediately?"

"Isn't it—isn't it too late?"

"Not for me."

"Then please, please come."

"Of course I will. Try not to distress yourself. Is Miss Anderson still there?"

"Fanny's in the room. Do you want her?"

"My God! No." (Had Miss Todd heard aright?) "In fact, Miss Emily, I'd be greatly obliged if would tell her to go to bed."

"I—I couldn't."

"Why not? Surely she doesn't propose making a third party at our conversation?"

"I don't know. I think so. You see, she found out about Grier and told me."

"Exactly. Well, will you give her a message? No, no, I do not wish to give it myself. Please tell her that I shall be with you, all being well, in about twenty minutes, and I am coming for a private interview. If she hasn't the tact to take herself off we'll go up to your bedroom."

"Oh, Mr. Massey!"

"Oh, ma'am!"

He rang off. Miss Todd turned to Fanny. "Mr. Massey's coming over," she stated baldly.

"Now? To-night? At this hour? Emily!"

"Why not?"

"But you're in a dressing-gown and your hair——"

"Mr. Massey's often seen me in a dressing-gown and with my hair plaited. He used to come over to see Papa as late as this, and I was in his room just as I am now."

"Well, I'm dressed, luckily."

"He wants you to go to bed."

"Mr. Massey does?"

"Yes."

"My dear Emily, you cannot see him at this hour—getting on for eleven—all by yourself. Of course I shall stop."

Exuding outraged propriety Fanny sat down in an arm-chair.

"But, Fanny—— Mr. Massey is coming to see me."

"About Grier?"

"I—— Yes. I haven't said exactly what's happened, but he will have to be told, and——"

"Then I consider that I have every right to be present, Emily, apart from any considerations of propriety, seeing that I was the person who providentially discovered Grier's disgraceful goings-on. Of course I must give Mr. Massey a full account of all I saw. You aren't in a condition to, far too hysterical."

"I am not hysterical."

"You sound as though you were."

"Well, I'm not. I am quite calm, and—and please go upstairs, Fanny. I don't want to be rude, but it's really no business of yours. Grier is my gardener."

"He oughtn't to be anybody's gardener. Dishonest wretch!"

"You don't know that he's dishonest."

"I tell you he is!"

A door creaked open cautiously.

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie!"

"Yes, ma'am. I heard voices and came down. Is anything wrong?"

"No. At least—— Mr. Massey is coming over to see me. I am glad you haven't gone to bed. Please let him in and stay up."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't you think Miss Todd ought to dress properly, Mrs. Crabbie?" Fanny looked up, an odd gleam in her eyes.

"Not for Mr. Massey, miss. Miss Emily needn't be ceremonious with him. Why, there was hardly a night, was there, ma'am, that Mr. Massey

didn't come over the last few months the poor master was alive, and you in your dressing-gown and with your hair the way it is now."

"I know, Mrs. Crabbie. I—I just told Miss Anderson that."

"And as I'm up, ma'am, there's no need for Miss Anderson to stop out of her bed."

"No. Please go, Fanny. I feel such a wretch disturbing you."

"Oh, I wasn't in bed, dear."

"You said you had a headache. I'm sure you're tired. Oh, you wanted some eau-de-Cologne. There's a flask on my dressing-table. Just go in and take it."

"It's so good of you, dearest Emily. Mrs. Crabbie, wasn't that the bell?"

"I heard it, miss, thank you."

Mrs. Crabbie sailed out. Miss Todd sat down limply on the sofa. Fanny made no attempt to leave her selected arm-chair. Did she calmly intend to sit there throughout the whole interview? Could Mr. Massey dislodge her, short of rudeness or physical force?

He came in, bland, calm, wearing impeccable evening dress. Although he sat down to a solitary dinner every night Mr. Massey always attired himself conventionally for this. Miss Todd stood up and gave him a shaky hand. He bowed over it.

"Good evening, my dear Miss Emily. I must apologize sincerely for coming here at this hour, but it occurred to me that you might sleep better if we had our talk now instead of postponing it until the morning. Ah, Miss Anderson. Good evening."

"Good evening, Mr. Massey."

"You must not allow us to keep you up." Mr. Massey turned his back squarely upon Fanny, blotting her out, as it were, from the scene. "Now, Miss Emily, don't sit perched on the edge of the sofa in the uncomfortable way you were doing when I arrived. Let me suggest this chair. That is better. Now, another cushion and a footstool. Here's a big fellow which ought to be exactly the right height for you."

"Thank you." Miss Todd subsided feebly as directed.

"Shall we just have one lamp? The centre light's really not needed. And, Mrs. Crabbie, you will be handy should we require you, I suppose, though there's no necessity to sit up to let me out?"

"Yes, sir; but you've only to ring if you want anything or the mistress does."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Crabbie went out. Mr. Massey moved across the room and held the door open. Fanny Anderson did not move.

"You are keeping Miss Todd in a draught, Miss Anderson, as long as this door isn't shut."

"I am not going. Please close it and sit down, Mr. Massey."

Again Miss Todd had the dazed realization that Fanny had spoken as though she were mistress of the house.

"Miss Anderson, I dislike argument or contention. I have no idea of entering into a discussion with you as to whether you ought to be present during my conversation with Miss Todd, but you must pardon my seeming discourtesy if I tell you plainly that you are not going to be."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because—forgive my speaking bluntly—the matter does not concern you."

"It does—it does." Fanny sat up, talking fast and eagerly. "You don't understand. Emily was over-wrought and hysterical and when she rang you up she didn't tell you what had happened, did she, or what she wanted to consult you about?"

"I gathered that it referred to Grier, Miss Todd's gardener."

"Yes, it does. Don't you see, Mr. Massey, that it was I who found out the whole thing, who opened poor dear Emily's eyes, who can substantiate everything because I saw it? I ought to be here when she tells you the disgraceful story."

Mr. Massey looked at Miss Todd. She said faintly:

"Fanny had better stay, I think. It's quite true that she did see Grier— She'll explain to you——"

A fleeting look crossed Mr. Massey's face before it resumed its ordinary inscrutable expression. Miss Todd winced. Had she read contempt and reproach in her old friend's eyes? If you had supported me, he seemed to say, I might have got rid of Miss Anderson. Now she's here, with your permission and approval, so I suppose she'll have to stop.

Miss Todd flinched and turned her head from the light. How impossible it was to explain that Fanny rendered her powerless. Even with Mr. Massey to take her part she could not aid him in ejecting Fanny politely. Next day Fanny would be too terrible, injured, argumentative, reproachful, hurt, putting Miss Todd in the wrong, pointing out how differently she ought to have acted, making her so bewildered and miserable that the only course was to allow Fanny her own way every time. It sounded absurd, ridiculous, when Fanny was merely an acquaintance of a few weeks' standing, a guest in the house for a short period, but there it was. Or, to be accurate, there Fanny was, established firmly, subtly dominating the whole room, thrusting Miss Todd into the shade completely, overpowering even Mr. Massey. He looked annoyed as he shut the door and took a chair near Miss Todd's.

"Don't sit there, please, Mr. Massey. It's so high-backed and uncomfortable." Her protest came nervously. "Won't you have the arm-chair?"

"I prefer this, thank you." He turned to Fanny. "Now, Miss Anderson, what is this tale you have about Grier?"

His tone was sharp, more like that of the examining counsel than the favoured and familiar family friend. Miss Todd would have wilted under it had he addressed her thus, but Fanny was quite equal to the occasion.

"It's no 'tale'. It's simply what I saw with my own eyes. Emily and I were in one of the hot-houses this morning and this man Grier was working there. At least," Fanny corrected herself conscientiously, "I suppose he was working. He didn't seem to me to be very busy."

"Oh, Fanny, Grier——"

"Please don't interrupt me, dearest Emily. I'm so anxious to give Mr. Massey the facts exactly as they are. Well, afterwards I asked Emily what became of the surplus fruit and vegetables from her gardens and hot-houses, and she said she didn't know."

"Is it a matter of very great importance, Miss Emily?"

"No. At least, I think not. I can't see why it should be. I told Fanny we used a good deal in the house and the cottage hospital was sent a certain quantity every week, and—and I didn't think there could be a large amount over, and if there were it didn't matter. It doesn't."

"Precisely. Will you kindly continue, Miss Anderson?"

"I was going to tell you, when Emily interrupted, that I had my suspicions of this man Grier almost immediately. He was idle, and might quite well be dishonest. When Emily admitted that she knew nothing of how her garden produce was used, or how much of it remained over, I saw what admirable opportunities for dishonesty this afforded Grier."

"In what way?"

"He could sell it privately."

"Did you suggest to Miss Todd that he was doing so?"

"I told her that I thought it quite likely. She took a reprehensibly casual view of the matter and gave me the impression that she didn't care if he did."

"But, Fanny, I only said I was certain that Grier never——"

"Emily, it would be politer if you allowed me to finish. Mr. Massey asked me to tell him what had occurred. I'm trying to, but you won't let me."

"Is there anything more besides your uncharitable suspicions, Miss Anderson?"

How brave Mr. Massey is, reflected Miss Todd. Now, if I'd dared to say such a thing to Fanny——

"They are not uncharitable, Mr. Massey. They were based on what turns out to have been a sure instinct. After dinner I strolled into the garden to look at the sunset. Emily was tired and I was afraid of the dew giving her cold. I happened to be near the lodge at the gates——"

It was Mr. Massey's turn to interrupt.

"'Happened'? Are you sure that you did not go there deliberately?"

"Certainly not. Why should I? I had no idea that Grier lived in the lodge."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"Was he doing anything you objected to?"

"I had no right to object. He isn't my gardener, but when I saw my dear Emily being robbed in the most barefaced, atrocious fashion under my nose, it was only my duty to open her eyes to Grier's methods."

"And these are——?"

"Selling garden produce on the sly. I saw him wheel out a barrow full of fruit and vegetables, and a most disreputable-looking individual gave him money and took the barrow away."

"All this happened in your presence?"

"I saw it."

"Where were you?"

"I've already told you. Just by the lodge."

"And Grier carried out this—er—transaction with you standing by in full view as a witness?"

"He—didn't see me."

"How was that?"

Mr. Massey's tone sounded suave, casual, but Miss Todd saw Fanny hesitate and frown.

"I stepped behind some bushes. He couldn't see me."

"Ah! Spying, in short?"

"It was not spying. As I've said, I suspected the man and the sight of the barrow made me realize that something underhand was going on."

"Then why didn't you ask Grier what he was doing with it?"

"It was no business of mine. I didn't like to interfere. Probably he would have been insolent and I should have had to complain to Emily, and I had no wish to create unpleasantness between her and one of her employees."

"H'm. I see."

"I'm sure Grier will be able to explain," bleated Miss Todd.

"We must leave that till the morning." Mr. Massey stood up.

"Oh, are you going?" Miss Todd asked apprehensively.

"Not immediately. I think, though, that we need not keep Miss Anderson out of her bed any longer, need we, my dear Miss Emily? She has given us her version of events and that is quite sufficient, is it not?"

"I—I suppose so. Do go to bed, Fanny. Mr. Massey knows now exactly what happened, and he can advise me how to deal with Grier."

"Yes. Good night, Miss Anderson."

Very slowly Fanny rose. She walked down the room and past the door which Mr. Massey was holding open for her. Almost ostentatiously she crossed the hall and mounted the stairs. Mr. Massey watched her out of sight. Then, to Miss Todd's surprise, instead of closing the door he wheeled a tall leather screen across the aperture.

"Shall you feel the draught, Miss Emily?"

"Oh, no, thank you, but why not shut the door?"

Mr. Massey's reply appalled Miss Todd. It was so unexpected, so blunt, so damaging to poor Fanny.

"Because I don't want Miss Anderson listening outside it."

"Listening? Fanny? Oh! Oh, I'm quite certain she wouldn't——"

"It's very generous of you, but did you never suspect her of eavesdropping?"

Miss Todd's swiftly mounting colour was sufficient answer.

"She practically admitted just now that she was spying on Grier. What is to prevent her from doing the same here? I feel certain that she would very much enjoy overhearing our conversation after being so definitely excluded from participating in it."

Although she had protested that she was not feeling any draught Miss Todd began to shiver.

"Why didn't you get rid of her at first if you didn't want her here?"

"I preferred to have her version before getting yours. Is it true, Miss Emily, what she alleges about Grier?"

"I—I suppose it is. I've no reason to doubt Fanny's word. She couldn't—she couldn't make it up. I'm afraid it's true."

"Then, may I ask, what course of action do you propose to take?"

Miss Todd mumbled that she did not know. Grier might be able to explain.

"But if he cannot?"

"What do you think I'd better do?"

"Grier has been here a good number of years?"

"About twenty-five at least. He was only fifteen when he started as a garden-boy. Old Scholes was gardener then. Grier always says he taught him everything, and when Scholes died Papa gave Grier his post." Miss Todd's voice broke. "Papa was so fond of Grier. After he'd had his first stroke he liked to be wheeled round the gardens in his chair, and Grier and

he used to have quite long talks. It—it was a little difficult sometimes to make out what he said, but Grier was very clever at interpreting and so patient. I can't send him to prison, Mr. Massey."

"Tut! tut! I hope there's no idea of that. I think you'd better let me tackle the fellow."

"Oh, would you?"

"Certainly. There may be some quite simple explanation."

Miss Todd's head drooped. "And—and if there isn't?"

"Then, I fear, you must decide for yourself whether you are going to retain him in your service."

"Fanny——"

"Yes, Miss Emily? What about Miss Anderson?"

"She thinks—— She said I ought to send him away at once."

"Without hearing his version?"

"She doesn't believe he can have any excuse."

"And she proposes, in fact, orders you to dismiss him?"

"She seemed to think I couldn't do anything else."

Mr. Massey demanded explosively: "What business is it of hers?"

"Oh, I—I don't know, but evidently she feels I've been cheated by Grier over a long period and—and it ought to stop."

"If it has been going on for some time most certainly it ought to, but has it?"

"I don't know. I never suspected——"

"Until Miss Anderson, quite unwarrantably and in a gratuitously interfering manner, put the idea into your head?"

"She said she saw Grier and the barrow and this other man. I—I don't know what to think."

"Shall we leave matters for to-night?" Mr. Massey stood up. "I will come here to-morrow morning before I go into Market Batnors and have a word with Grier. Then I can report to you, and you can decide what you think best. Does that meet with your approval?"

"Oh, thank you. Yes, I suppose we'd better do as you say. Only, Mr. Massey, please don't leave me alone with Fanny after you've seen Grier."

"Why not?"

"Because—— Oh, because she'll argue and raise objections and talk me into agreeing to anything she wants."

"But, Miss Emily, as I asked before, what business is it of hers?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid she's rather inclined to—to manage."

"That is quite evident."

"I'm sure she means well. She was very annoyed when she thought Grier had been cheating me."

"Are you not capable of attending to your own affairs?"

"Fanny thinks I'm not. She's afraid I let myself be exploited. Timmins and Mrs. Crabbie and Taylor—she's succeeded in finding out something against every one of them. Oh, not like Grier, not—dishonesty, but it's been so unpleasant all day. I don't know what to do."

"Do nothing. I will see this business through for you."

"You're so good to me."

"Will you do something for me in return?"

"Oh, if—if I can."

"Then get rid of Miss Anderson."

"How—how can I?"

"Quite simply. Tell her that you resent her interference in your household affairs and that you think her visit had better terminate."

"I—I can't say that."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't. And besides, Fanny wouldn't go."

"That is absurd. She could hardly continue to remain here in the face of your expressing a wish that she would leave."

"Perhaps—perhaps she may soon. I didn't fix any time limit, you know. A week more—I can't be rude."

Mr. Massey shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we had better see this business of Grier's through first. Now, run off to bed, ma'am, and try to put all these unpleasantnesses out of your head. I shan't let you down."

"Oh, I'm sure you never, never would."

Mrs. Crabbie appeared silently when she heard the voices of her mistress and Mr. Massey in the hall. She opened the front door for him and as soon as he had entered his car and it had begun receding down the drive turned to Miss Todd.

"Do go to bed, ma'am. You look quite ill, if you'll forgive my saying so."

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie, it's dreadful!"

"Would you like me to sit up with you, ma'am, or have Mary? She's still downstairs."

"You're very kind, but I don't think I need keep either of you up. I expect I'll sleep once I'm in bed. Oh!"

This exclamation was called forth by the appearance of Fanny Anderson. She wore a striped dressing-gown and her expression was stern and disapproving.

"Emily, do come upstairs. I heard the car drive away so I knew that Mr. Massey had gone, but here is Mrs. Crabbie, talking and keeping you standing. It's too bad of her."

"Excuse me, miss, but I was just suggesting to the mistress that Mary or myself sat up with her."

"Why? Oh, dearest Emily, don't say you're feeling ill."

"No—no! It's—it's all right. I was just coming, Fanny. Good night, Mrs. Crabbie. Please go to bed and tell Mary to go. We're all shockingly late to-night."

Miss Todd managed to produce a feeble little laugh as she turned away and mounted the stairs under Fanny's stern eye. She was miserably conscious that Mrs. Crabbie watched her pityingly and that Mary had come up from the kitchen and joined the housekeeper. No doubt downstairs they were all discussing Mr. Massey's late visit, speculating as to the cause, and talking about her behind her back. Well, what did it matter? If Grier were dismissed everybody must know in time. She swayed a little. Fanny passed an arm round her.

"Poor Emily! You're quite exhausted, and I'm sure it's no wonder with that tiresome man coming over and keeping you up. I've no doubt he bullied you into doing exactly as he suggested."

"Mr. Massey didn't suggest anything, except that we should wait till the morning before taking any steps."

"And then?"

"Please don't ask me any more questions now, Fanny. I'm too tired to think, and you ought to be in bed. I thought you'd gone there long ago."

"I went upstairs when that uncivil lawyer of yours practically ordered me out of the library in his discourteous fashion; but how could I go to bed until I'd seen whether you needed anything?"

"That's very kind of you, but I don't. You heard Mrs. Crabbie offer to sit up, but I'll be quite all right if I just get some sleep. Are you sure you wouldn't like your breakfast in bed?"

"No, thank you, but I'm certain you ought to have yours there, dearest Emily."

"I'm not going to. For one thing, as I said before, I hate it, and for another, I want to be up early with Mr. Massey coming over at ten o'clock."

"Oh, he's coming here then? I thought his visit to-night was instead of the one to-morrow."

Miss Todd bit her lip.

"He's coming, but it won't affect you. Good night, Fanny. We'll see each other at breakfast."

Fanny's hostess bolted into her room.

She lay awake for some time and finally fell into a heavy, exhausted sleep. Her dreams were nightmares in which Grier pursued Fanny, brandishing a pitchfork. Mr. Massey and Mrs. Karslake eloped together, and Mrs. Crabbie declared that the house was haunted and she must leave at once. Miss Todd woke, unrefreshed, her heart thudding unpleasantly. She could not fall asleep again, but tossed for what seemed hours, watching the room gradually lightening and listening to birds calling and chorusing. At length Mary came in with early tea and suggested turning on Miss Todd's bath.

"Oh, thank you, Mary. Yes, I suppose I'd better get up."

"Did you have any sleep, ma'am?"

"Not very much. It—it was such a hot night. Has Miss Anderson been called yet?"

"Rose has just gone to her room, ma'am."

A bath refreshed Miss Todd and she felt less jaded as she went downstairs. She did not wait for Fanny. Fanny knew her way. They could meet in the dining-room. Miss Todd dreaded the first encounter. Only that it would most certainly have involved a visit from Fanny, bright, solicitous, affectionately anxious, she regretted that she had not agreed to the suggestion of breakfasting in bed. Also, it might establish a precedent and put her at Fanny's mercy, giving her free entry into her dearest Emily's bedroom from an early hour. Fanny was sitting in her accustomed place at table as Miss Todd appeared. She looked alert, trim, ready for the fray. The fray! The battle of Grier *versus* Fanny Anderson was about to begin in grim earnest. Miss Todd trembled.

"Good morning, Fanny."

"Good morning, dearest Emily. Another lovely day!"

"Yes. It's going to be very hot, I think. I hope you slept well?"

"Quite well, thank you. What about you?"

"Oh, I dreamed a great deal, but I'm not a very good sleeper. Have I kept you waiting, Fanny? I'm so sorry."

"Not at all, dear. It's only just nine. There's your lovely old grand-

father clock chiming. I thought I'd better be a little early as you'd arranged to discontinue Taylor sounding the gong and I didn't want to annoy any of your maids or Mrs. Crabbie by being late for breakfast."

Fanny sounded meek, pliable, anxious not to exceed her guest's privileges, but Miss Todd suspected a pose. She said pleasantly:

"Well, it was you who suggested that we did without the gong, you know."

"Only in order to spare your nerves, Emily. I could see how the horrible noise Taylor was making upset you. I really couldn't understand why she should be allowed the opportunity of working off her ill-temper by such a din."

"Taylor isn't ill-tempered."

"She's sulky and inclined to give herself airs. You forget how unpleasant she was last night about your little tray and the way she deliberately forgot to bring any biscuits."

"Don't begin on it all over again, please, Fanny, and before we've had anything to eat."

"Well, I only hope she'll remember your orders about port this morning."

"It doesn't matter if she doesn't. I don't want to start a bad habit."

Taylor came in as Miss Todd spoke. She brought over various hot dishes from the lift. Miss Todd took a boiled egg and Fanny ate a plateful of a breakfast cereal, topped with syrup, a helping of kidneys and bacon, a little fish, and ended with raspberries and cream. Her hostess nibbled dry toast and drank some coffee. Fanny had three cups and apologized for keeping Miss Todd sitting at the table.

"There's no hurry, dear. Do make a good breakfast."

"I wish you'd eat something. You've a little bird's appetite, Emily."

Miss Todd muttered an excuse about the hot day.

"I don't think it's as warm as yesterday. There's a lovely breeze."

"It's going to be hot later. That mist always means heat. Are you sure you've finished, Fanny? Won't you have a grape-fruit? No? Well, shall we go into the drawing-room?"

Fanny rose slowly.

"What about your housekeeping?" she inquired.

"I don't quite understand."

"Are you going to see Mrs. Crabbie before Mr. Massey comes or wait till after he's gone?"

"I—I wonder—— There isn't very much to arrange. What is the time now? Twenty minutes to ten. Perhaps I'd better see her straight away. Will you look at the paper or amuse yourself somehow?"

"Of course."

Miss Todd bent lagging steps towards the kitchen. She hated the thought of food, but if she allowed Mrs. Crabbie to select and serve what she chose Fanny would say that the housekeeper was given far too much of her own way. Mrs. Crabbie exclaimed in dismay at Miss Todd's wan appearance as she entered.

"It's nothing. I slept badly. Mr. Massey's coming here at ten, Mrs. Crabbie, so I thought we'd get the meals arranged first."

"Very good, ma'am."

"Can you suggest anything for lunch?"

"The fishmonger's sent up a beautiful piece of salmon, ma'am. What

about salmon mayonnaise, and there are quite enough red currants ready to make a nice tart?"

"Yes. That would do very well. Oh, and dinner?"

"Would you like to begin with cream of mushroom soup, ma'am, and then halibut and lamb cutlets? I found an interesting recipe for a savoury in the new number of *The Culinary Guide*. We might try it. And a strawberry jelly with whipped cream?"

Miss Todd nodded thankfully. Evidently Mrs. Crabbie was endeavouring to make amends for the atrocious dinner of the previous night.

"Yes. That ought to be very nice."

There seemed no more to say. Miss Todd lingered, listening to Mrs. Crabbie's request for a new preserving pan, and then went upstairs again. Fanny Anderson's name had not been mentioned, but Miss Todd gathered vaguely from Mrs. Crabbie's manner that the latter was pitying her. To be pitied by her own housekeeper! Was Fanny right, and did Mrs. Crabbie consider her a fool, ripe for being exploited, bullied, got round, and laughed at? Had Mr. Massey arrived and gone to the lodge? Was Grier abject, defiant, guilty, or brazen? Would he come with Mr. Massey, or was she to be subjected to the ordeal of interviewing him under his own roof? Could Fanny be excluded, or would Mr. Massey confront Grier with Fanny and her story? When all this was settled, one way or another, Miss Todd must write to Mrs. Lawley. If she came Fanny might be less aggressive.

That was the one word to describe her—aggressive. Fanny Anderson was aggressive. She, a visitor, Miss Todd's guest, by her own admission homeless, practically penniless, apparently considered that during her sojourn at the Croft she was in a position to dictate, to argue, to criticize, to ring bells, to give orders, to relegate Miss Todd to a subservient acquiescence in everything she wished. Miss Todd's thin blood suddenly boiled. The gong, the supper-tray, the port, this unpleasantness with Grier were all symbolical of Fanny's subtle usurping of Miss Todd's normal authority. She would not stand it. She was not going to put up with it. Even though it involved a quarrel, a breach, a definite breaking-off of friendly relations, one scene, however appalling, was a cheap price to pay for ridding herself of Fanny. Directly Mr. Massey had gone——

"Emily dearest!"

Fanny had come out of the drawing-room.

"Yes? Did you want me?"

"Only to tell you that I see Mr. Massey walking up the drive."

"Isn't he in his car?"

"No. Grier is with him."

Miss Todd's knees knocked together.

"Will you see them in the library, dear?"

"I—— Oh, I don't know. Mr. Massey had better say."

"I think we should both go into the library and be there when they arrive. Taylor can show Mr. Massey in and tell Grier to wait on the steps."

"'We'?"

"Of course. Why, dearest Emily, you don't suppose I'd leave you to go through this unpleasantness all by yourself, do you?"

"Mr. Massey will be there."

"That isn't the same as another woman. You oughtn't to be alone, and

it is hardly the kind of interview you would care to ask Mrs. Crabbie to witness, is it?"

"No. No. Only I think Mr. Massey would rather that no one else was present, Fanny. It's entirely a matter between Grier and myself."

"But seeing that I saw it all and have brought Grier to book I should most certainly be there to hear his explanation—if he's got one."

"I'm quite sure he has; only, please, Fanny——"

The door-bell rang. Taylor went noiselessly to answer it. Mr. Massey came in, exchanged a pleasant word with Taylor, and advanced to the cowering Miss Todd.

"Good morning, Miss Emily. Here I am, according to promise. Good morning, Miss Anderson."

"Good morning, Mr. Massey."

"Good morning. Fanny thinks——"

"I think you ought to sit down. You look very tired." Deftly Mr. Massey steered Miss Todd towards the library.

"Where's Grier?" bleated his mistress.

"He is waiting outside. We have had a satisfactory interview, I may say, very satisfactory indeed. Shall I tell him to come in?"

"Oh, yes. I suppose I'd better get it over."

"Grier!"

"Ere, sir."

"Come along. Miss Todd's waiting."

Grier slouched into the room. At his heels came Fanny. She shut the door, announcing breathlessly, determinedly: "I must be here, Mr. Massey. Poor Emily will require my support. It's only right that I should be present."

"My dear Miss Anderson, who is preventing you? Won't you sit down? I understand that you have brought a charge against Grier, a decidedly serious one. Kindly let us hear exactly of what you accuse him."

Miss Todd shrank from the sullen gleam in Fanny's eyes. Now that she had forced her way into the room and insisted on remaining throughout the interview only to meet with no opposition from Mr. Massey, she did not seem so determined or so certain. She flushed unbecomingly and muttered that she had no wish to intrude. She only wanted to help Emily by being there.

"I asked you what was the charge you bring against Grier, Miss Anderson."

"You know. You heard about it last night from me."

"But I prefer your version from your own lips in Grier's presence."

"He's a thief."

"Ere, now, miss. None o' that."

"Grier, please, please——"

"Don't get upset, Miss Emily. Miss Anderson, can you substantiate that?"

"Of course I can. Last night I saw Grier wheel out a barrow full of stuff—vegetables and fruit—and a man took it away and paid him for it."

"Full, was it?"

"I—I wasn't very near, but it looked fairly full to me."

"Oh, you were not very near, yet you maintain that it contained a good deal?"

"Yes."

"Grier, can you explain?"

"'Course I can, sir. I've my own plot behind the lodge and I grows a fairish bit of things there. There's more than we can use, Mother and me. I didn't see no 'arm in sellin' what was over."

"Do you object to Grier doing this, Miss Emily?"

"No. He's perfectly within his rights. I just did not happen to know about it."

Grier gave Miss Todd a sour smile.

"Well, Miss Anderson?"

"Well—what?"

"You have heard Grier's explanation. Miss Todd is completely satisfied with it. I think you should withdraw your accusation of theft and express your regret for having misjudged him."

Fanny tossed her head.

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Mr. Massey. You may be satisfied and say that poor Emily is, but I don't think it's at all satisfactory. What is there to prevent Grier from selling his own produce and adding stuff that belongs to Emily? There was so much on that barrow. It couldn't all have come from that tiny little garden at the back of the lodge."

"Been sneakin' round there, 'ave you, miss?"

"Oh, how dare you!"

Fanny looked ready to fall on Grier and grind him to pieces. Miss Todd shuddered. How unpleasant this was, although Grier had vindicated himself. She began a feeble defence of the man.

"I'm sure it's all right, Fanny. Grier's garden mayn't be very big, but it's surprising what a lot he gets from it. The cauliflower we had for lunch yesterday was his growing. You thought it very good, didn't you, Mr. Massey?"

"It was most excellent, Miss Emily. But I am waiting for Miss Anderson to apologize to Grier."

There was a dead silence. Fanny's colour mounted. Miss Todd looked imploringly at her.

"Fanny, don't you think——?" she began uncomfortably.

"I certainly didn't think that you would expose your guest to this, Emily," Fanny snapped.

"But, Fanny—— You were mistaken, you know. You said yourself you were standing behind the bushes——"

"'Idin' behind 'em, she means, ma'am."

"Oh, hush, Grier. Well, anyway, I'm sure you couldn't have seen very well what was on the barrow—I mean how much. I dare say Grier had put sacking or newspapers underneath the vegetables——"

"That's right, ma'am."

"And it looked more than it actually was."

"Even if it did, what difference does that make?"

"Only that I think—— I feel—— Mr. Massey expects you to tell Grier you're sorry you misjudged him, and then I hope we need say no more about it. Need we, Mr. Massey?"

"I certainly have no wish to, Miss Emily."

"Then—— Fanny?"

"No, Emily. I cannot see that I am in any way to blame. I acted in your best interests, and although you may have been persuaded that nothing was wrong I, personally, am not satisfied."

"Give you my word, miss, there ain't nothink as it shouldn't be." Grier coughed. "I 'aven't been in service 'ere twenty-five years to start robbin' Miss Emily at this time o' day."

"It isn't only 'this time o' day'. How does she know you haven't been doing it for years—all along, in fact?"

Grier turned to Mr. Massey.

"She ain't got no right to go sayin' such things, sir. You're an educated gentleman and a man of Lor, and you can put it better than me, but I'll 'ave 'er know I'm not goin' to stand 'ere bein' called a thief to my face, nor before Miss Emily's face neither."

"Oh, Grier, Miss Anderson didn't mean that."

"Well, wot else did she mean, ma'am? She says I've been takin' stuff I've no right to and sellin' it behind your back. I tell you and 'er, Miss Emily, ma'am, and Mr. Massey, sir, as I never took nor sold as much as a broad bean nor a runner bean nor a spring cabbage nor a stick o' celery nor a sprig of parsley nor a cucumber nor an artichoke nor a tomato nor a turnip nor a cauliflower, let alone asparagus or 'ot-'ouse grapes, nor apricots or peaches or strawberries, and raspberries and loganberries and gooseberries and currants, red, black, or white, nor——"

"That'll do, Grier." Mr. Massey was laughing.

"Well, sir, a chap don't like 'is character took away for nothing, and by a lady as is visitin' 'ere and puts in the time spyin' on honest folk."

"You insolent fellow!"

Fanny's breast heaved. Her eyes flashed dangerously. Grier shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, ma'am, I'd better be gettin' back to my work. Seein' you and Mr. Massey there's satisfied as I ain't no thief I'll not waste your time nor my own standin' 'ere any longer waitin' for Miss Anderson to tell us all she's sorry she made a mistake." He glared at Fanny and added contemptuously: "I don't know who you are miss, nor where you comes from, or 'ow poor Miss Emily picked you up, but you're no lady I'll lay. A lady wouldn't 'ave been ashamed to apologize and say 'ow she was wrong, but you won't, and you can keep your regrets to yourself. I wouldn't 'ave 'em."

Grier touched his forehead to Miss Todd, nodded clumsily to Mr. Massey, and, ignoring Fanny, slouched out.

"Oh, dear!" moaned Miss Todd.

"Grier has reminded me that time is getting on." Mr. Massey consulted his watch and rose hurriedly. "I must be off too. You will excuse me, Miss Emily."

"Yes. Let me see you out."

"No, no, don't trouble. My car is at the lodge." He met her distressed glance and suggested blandly: "Well, why not walk down with me as far as that? It's a most beautiful morning."

"Emily dearest?"

"Yes. What is it, Fanny?"

"You won't go out and tire yourself further after this unpleasant scene? It's so warm, and you know how the hot weather upsets you."

"We'll take it slowly, Miss Anderson, and the fresh air's good for everybody." Mr. Massey held open the door. "Come along, ma'am. You won't want a coat."

"I quite agree with you about fresh air, Mr. Massey." Fanny strolled

past him, smiling. "I think I'll come too, Emily, and then you and I can walk back together."

Miss Todd gazed helplessly from Fanny to Mr. Massey. What was she to do? Even to her it became patent that Fanny had no intention of allowing her to be alone with her trustee. Short of telling Fanny plainly that neither of them wanted her, and poor Miss Todd quailed before the prospect of the scene which this would evoke, she saw no way of evading Fanny's company. Her imploring look towards Mr. Massey only met with eloquently shrugged shoulders and a slightly wry smile. Evidently Mr. Massey realized also that Fanny was determined not to be repulsed or shaken off.

"We'll just be back in time for Emily's little nip of port." Fanny became arch and playful. "I think you told Taylor to have it ready at a quarter to eleven every morning."

"Oh, yes, dear. But I still think it's a pity to begin having it regularly."

"No. You need it. Doesn't she, Mr. Massey?"

"I should say that for the present Miss Todd required all the support she can get."

Mr. Massey spoke dryly, non-committally, but Miss Todd saw Fanny redden. It was rather dreadful of him to imply that she was finding Fanny too much for her, yet this was the truth. Shaken, mentally and physically, how welcome would have been the stroll down to the lodge in Mr. Massey's company, his bland reassurance that the incident of Grier's alleged dishonesty was satisfactorily explained and closed, their ordinary easy intercourse, a chat about the past, pleasant plans for the future. Fanny's inimical presence would effectually spoil all these. Silently she allowed Fanny to wind a fluffy scarf round her throat, to slip an arm through hers, to walk beside her down the steps. Mr. Massey was on Fanny's other side. "The jam in the sandwich," she exclaimed gaily.

"I thought it was 'a rose between two thorns'," rejoined Miss Todd helplessly.

"I'm a little old to be compared to a rose, dearest Emily," Fanny sighed.

Mr. Massey began a long story about Farmer Garrett and his new reaping-machine. The anecdote lasted until the lodge gates hove in view. There was no sign of Grier. The chauffeur climbed down out of the stationary car, but at a word from his employer returned to his place and drove into the road. Mr. Massey bade both his companions farewell. Fanny turned her attention to a heap of rubbish close to the gates, and he seized his opportunity. A beckoning gesture to Miss Todd brought her stealthily beside him as far as the motor.

"Thank you so much." Her voice thickened and faltered. "When shall I see you again?"

"I'll ring up and arrange a meeting. In the meantime—— The office, Benson." He mounted into the car. "Good-bye once more, Miss Emily. And—— *Get rid of that woman.*"

"You mean—Fanny?"

"I do. *Get rid of her.*"

The car slid down the road. Miss Todd, watching it fade from sight, felt Fanny's hand on her arm and started violently. Had Fanny overheard?

"Don't stand there in the sun, you reckless person. Is there another way back to the house, or must we toil up the avenue again?"

"We can go through the gardens along that path and in by the kitchen

garden, but—— Are you tired, Fanny? You needn't have come if you hadn't liked, you know."

Miss Todd's tone sounded sharp, irritated. Fanny was really rather tiresome. She had insisted on coming with Miss Todd and Mr. Massey forced her company upon them although she must have known that they would prefer to be without her, and now she seemed to resent the length of the avenue which had to be traversed before she could regain the house.

"Of course I'm not tired. I was perfectly aware that neither you nor Mr. Massey wanted me, but I thought it only wise to come too and prevent him from fagging you out."

"He hasn't."

"You look ready to drop. I'm sure your heart——"

"Miss Emily?"

With another start Miss Todd turned round. An old woman, incredibly aged and wrinkled in the strong sunlight, had come out of the lodge.

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Grier. How are you?"

"Come along, Emily." Fanny's voice was decided.

"I'm pretty well, considerin', thank you, ma'am."

"Fanny, this is Mrs. Grier. She lives at the lodge. Miss Anderson's staying with me," Miss Todd explained.

"So my Jim told me, ma'am."

Fanny flushed and looked annoyed.

"How d'you do, Mrs. Grier? I'm sure it's too hot for Miss Todd to stand here. Shall we go back by the avenue after all, Emily? The trees make a lovely shade, and that path looks rather glaring."

"There's no call for Miss Emily to stand out 'ere, miss. Will you come in and sit down a bit, ma'am, and 'ave a glass o' lemonade?"

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Grier. Your parlour will be nice and cool."

The old woman nodded and shuffled back to the lodge.

"I don't want to go in, Emily. How tiresome of her! Let's go back to the house."

"We won't stay more than a few minutes. I can't hurt her feelings by refusing. Grier isn't here, so you needn't be afraid of coming across him."

Miss Todd's look was slightly contemptuous. Fanny frowned.

"It's not that, but I don't like you drinking lemonade—filthy home-brewed stuff I expect—and getting indigestion. You can't have your port on top of it."

Miss Todd asserted herself sufficiently to walk away from Fanny and follow Mrs. Grier into the lodge. Fanny came after her reluctantly.

The lodge was small, but exquisitely neat and clean. The visitors were ushered into a tiny parlour at the back, looking out on a garden gay with old-fashioned flowers. The strong scent of stocks and mignonette drifted in through the small-paned window. On the sill were pots of geraniums and fuchsias. A border of forget-me-nots, London pride, love-in-a-mist, and Iceland poppies ran below. Miss Todd had known and loved the place under Mrs. Grier's sway since her girlhood. There on the chimney-piece were the china dogs that she liked helping Mrs. Grier to wash, and the old samplers beside the cuckoo clock. Nasturtiums flamed in a flat dish on the crooked-legged work-table. A cat slept sprawled across a patchwork rug and two love-birds sat in a cage. It was all homely, sweet, familiar. Mrs. Grier, bent and wise, was a trusted friend. Fanny alone struck an alien,

discordant note. She sat down rebelliously in a rocking-chair, answering Mrs. Grier as briefly as possible any time the woman's obsolete courtesy included her in the conversation. Miss Todd felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. How much did Mrs. Grier know? What had Grier told his mother? The three talked a little of Miss Todd's holiday, her recent illness, Mrs. Grier's rheumatism, until finally Fanny spoke.

"What a pretty little garden you have, Mrs. Grier."

"'Tis my son's work, miss. Miss Emily 'ere will tell you I'm not able to do anything in it since my stroke."

"It looks beautifully kept. May I go out and see it properly?"

"You're welcome, miss. The back door's just at the end of the passage and I think it's open."

Miss Todd wondered why Fanny should leave her almost ostentatiously alone with Mrs. Grier, but she was too glad of Fanny's absence to object or speculate very deeply. The back door, which always squealed, gave its accustomed whine. Fanny had really gone out. How horrid to imagine that she might be standing in the passage, listening. . . .

"Good riddance!" observed Mrs. Grier briefly.

"Mrs. Grier!"

"Well, ma'am, I didn't intend no disrespect, but such a turn-up as that there Miss Anderson's been the cause of! 'Ow could you let 'er try to put you against my Jim, Miss Emily?"

"I didn't. I was horrified when she told me—— I said all along that I never believed a word of it. Did he tell you?"

"You might 'ave knocked me down with less than a feather, ma'am, when Mr. Massey came 'ere this morning. 'E's always straight and don't beat about the bush, and he come right in and told us both as the lady staying with you 'ad said that Jim was selling stuff from the garden on the sly—your stuff."

"Miss Anderson thought she saw—— She did see a barrow with some——some garden-produce, and I suppose she considered it strange. She told me about it and I was dreadfully upset. Grier explained. I hope it's all right," stammered Miss Todd.

"It is not all right, ma'am. Jim's feelings are badly 'urt, not to say nothing of mine."

"I'll raise his wages."

"Money doesn't make up for 'aving a man's character took away, ma'am."

"But it hasn't been. I'm perfectly satisfied and so is Mr. Massey."

"Jim ain't, ma'am."

"But we both told him we didn't believe the story."

"That Miss Anderson believes it. Jim told me she was downright insulting, called 'im insolent, and stuck to 'er tale that 'e was a-robbing of 'is employer."

"Mr. Massey said he thought she ought to apologize, but she didn't seem to agree. I'm—I'm very sorry, Mrs. Grier, but I couldn't make her, could I?"

"No, Miss Emily, only a lady wouldn't 'ave needed *making*."

"I know."

"It seems queer, ma'am, 'er coming back with you and stopping at the 'ouse, and first thing spying and prying, a regular Peeping Tom as you

might say, and starting this nasty story about Jim. Who is she, if I may make bold to ask?"

"I—I met her when I was away. She looked after me very kindly the time I fell ill, and I invited her to stay with me."

"I see, ma'am."

The cuckoo darted out of the carved clock and sounded his note eleven times.

"Oh, I'd no idea it had got so late. Where is Fanny? We ought to be getting back, and I'm keeping you from your work, Mrs. Grier."

"I've got my washing done early, thank you, ma'am, and the dinner's on the fire. Don't you 'urry. I'll just fetch the lemonade."

Mrs. Grier hobbled away and duly returned, carrying a tray with a tall jug containing her home-made lemonade and two glasses. Fanny followed. The old woman filled the tumblers and gave one to each.

"Aren't they lovely, Fanny?" Miss Todd asked nervously. "Ever since I was a small girl I've had my lemonade out of this one with the dragon handle, haven't I, Mrs. Grier?"

"That's right, miss."

"Mrs. Grier makes such delicious lemonade."

(Mrs. Grier was dead twenty-five years, but she had passed on the recipe for home-brewed lemonade to her son. The last time Miss Todd was at the lodge with Fanny, only a week earlier, he had given them each a glass of it. Miss Todd had drunk hers out of the familiar vessel, surviving all this time. Fanny had complained of the taste of hers, saying that it was bitter. What nonsense! Miss Todd's had had just the right amount of sweetening.) . . .

"Are you ready, Fanny?" she asked.

"Quite, dear."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Grier. I dare say I shall see Grier some time to-day."

"Yes, ma'am. Good morning."

Fanny and Mrs. Grier exchanged frosty farewells. Miss Todd and her guest were barely beyond the porch with its clematis and rambler roses when Fanny broke into angry speech.

"Emily! What a horrible old woman! How could you lower your dignity by going in there and sitting for hours, gossiping with her like—like an equal?"

"We were not gossiping, and I've only been inside the lodge about twenty minutes."

"It was far longer than that. And it's past eleven now and you've missed your glass of port."

"You know I didn't really want it. I much preferred Mrs. Grier's nice, cool lemonade."

"Nasty gassy stuff! I'm sure it'll give us both indigestion."

"I've drunk it for years now, Fanny, and it never did yet."

"You don't know what it's made of, or what she mightn't have put in it."

"Oh, that's absurd."

"Not at all. She looked a regular witch, a very fit mother for that son of hers."

"They are both perfectly respectable and old employees here."

"Then, as I said, it's all the more disgraceful of Grier to rob you."

Miss Todd felt sick, disgusted, chagrined, apprehensive of a renewed argument and a fresh scene.

"Please don't begin all over again about Grier, Fanny. It was a—mistake, and though I'm sorry you wouldn't admit yourself wrong and—and apologize to him, it doesn't matter. Only I prefer not to discuss it."

"You ought not to have let the matter drop so easily, Emily. I acknowledge that he sounded very plausible and played on your feelings and took you in——"

"He didn't. And what about Mr. Massey? He was thoroughly convinced of Grier's innocence. Grier couldn't hoodwink a clever lawyer like him."

"Mr. Massey saw how upset and hysterical you were. He had to soothe you at all costs. I dare say he and Grier arranged the whole thing between them."

"You mean—you mean that Mr. Massey is aiding and abetting Grier to rob me?"

Fanny laughed. The laugh sounded awkward and uneasy.

"Oh, nonsense, dearest Emily. That wasn't what I meant. No; I'm sure he and Grier rather concocted this story of Grier selling produce from his own plot. Mr. Massey knew that that would satisfy you, only you shouldn't have given way so easily."

"But what could I have done? I believed Grier and—and I thought Mr. Massey did too."

"Oh, he believed him, and of course the story had a foundation of truth. I've no doubt Grier does sell his own produce. When you were talking with the old woman I just did a little quiet investigation."

Fanny's eyes sparkled. She nodded mysteriously. Miss Todd gazed at her with something not far removed from horror, and not merely horror. It verged on hate.

"You needn't look so shocked. It was only in your own interests."

"But—— Oh, Fanny! Spying!"

"Nothing of the kind. I explored the garden and I admit that there is a good deal grown there in the way of vegetables, far more than two people could possibly use."

"Then Grier is perfectly right to dispose of anything that's over."

"You're so impetuous, Emily. Please allow me to finish."

Miss Todd waited, coldly silent.

"There's a little potting-shed. I looked in and saw baskets of early peas—beauties!—and some bundles of asparagus, and a big box of peaches. I'm certain those came from the hot-house and are part of the lot we saw ripening yesterday."

"Well?"

"Oh, Emily, can't you see? I never met anyone so stu—— hard to convince. Don't you realize that Grier is taking things from your garden and greenhouse and adding them to what he sells from his own plot? It was most disagreeable to have my word doubted, but I did see a quantity of stuff on that barrow, three or four times as much as Grier could grow on his own cabbage-patch." Fanny's scorn was indescribable. "The man's a common cheat and thief. You ought to dismiss him."

Miss Todd felt overwhelmed and bewildered by Fanny's wrath and vehemence. Why should she be so prejudiced against poor Grier? How horrible to stoop to petty spying around the man's own premises! So this was the reason for her apparent interest in Grier's garden, her wish to inspect it at closer quarters than a view from the window afforded, and her trium-

phant, renewed denunciation of Grier? What was she, Emily, to do? She could not resurrect the whole wretched business, drag Mr. Massey into it afresh, and invite Grier to explain. Phrases from Fanny's diatribe stayed in her memory. *Mr. Massey saw how upset and hysterical you were. He had to soothe you at all costs. I dare say he and Grier arranged the whole thing.* Was it possible that Mr. Massey, her kind trustee, Papa's old friend, looked upon her as an unbalanced, silly fool, who would believe any tale thus plausibly presented?

Could Fanny be right? Had she been thoroughly taken in, first by Grier, and later by Grier and Mr. Massey, acting in concert to deceive her?

"Oh, Fanny!" she murmured wretchedly.

They were almost at the house by now. Again it loomed as a prison where she would be shut in with Fanny, alone at the mercy of Fanny. This could not continue. She must write or telegraph to Mrs. Lawley, imploring her to come immediately. Yet how was a letter to be written and dispatched, much less a wire, without Fanny's knowledge, supervision, and almost certain disapproval? If she went upstairs to write it in her room Fanny was capable of pursuing her there. Immediately she saw an envelope addressed to Mrs. Lawley she would remind Miss Todd that Mrs. Lawley had been written to, at Miss Todd's request, by Fanny herself only yesterday. Even if she did not demand directly what was in the letter she would find out speedily by skilful, seemingly artless questioning. Miss Todd glanced wildly about her for any loophole, any means of accomplishing her harmless purpose. At the moment she saw none.

"I wonder if it's too late for your port, dearest Emily," Fanny mused.

"I don't want it, thank you."

"Of course you don't on top of that lemonade. I consider it rather deceitful of you to ask for it when I was out of the room. You knew I was anxious that you should have some wine at that time."

"I didn't ask for lemonade, Fanny. Mrs. Grier always brings it in. She's very proud of her special brew."

"I had to drink it out of politeness, but I thought it was very nasty."

"Well, have your own port. Here's Taylor. Oh, Taylor, I know you were asked to bring some port every morning, but it's rather late now and I had some of Mrs. Grier's lemonade, so I think you might just bring Miss Anderson hers."

"I won't drink it alone, dearest. You must keep me company, the way we arranged."

"Oh, Fanny, I'd so much sooner not. It'll only upset me."

"Nonsense! Bring a glass for Miss Todd too, Taylor."

Behind Fanny's back Miss Todd and Taylor exchanged a mutual glance of outraged astonishment. Miss Todd was aghast. To address Taylor like that, to give her an order, unsoftened by any 'please', in another person's house, and to bully—it was the only word—her hostess into drinking port she had no wish for! Fanny was really amazing. Perhaps the best way to treat her was to accept with good-humoured tolerance her managing ways and blunt discourtesies. Only—— How long would these continue?

Taylor brought in the port. This time biscuits accompanied it. Languidly Miss Todd nibbled and sipped. Despite her excellent breakfast and the lemonade Fanny seemed hungry. She ate innumerable biscuits with relish, drank her glass of wine, and required very little pressing to accept and dispose

of another. The room was still, warm, with bees humming in the lavender outside the window. Miss Todd stifled a yawn.

"Now, what about a little nap?" Fanny proposed archly.

"No, certainly not. I was disgracefully lazy yesterday. We might just rest for ten minutes, and then I have to go to the village."

"Oh! Isn't it anything I could do for you, dearest Emily? I can run down easily and save you a walk in this hot sun."

"No, thank you. The road's quite shady and it's not far."

"But what have you to get? Can't you telephone?"

Miss Todd shook her head. She had resolved to wire to Mrs. Lawley. Probably Fanny would insist on accompanying her to the post office, but short of watching over her shoulder whilst she despatched the telegram she would not be able to discover its purport. Unless Miss Todd showed it to her, Fanny could hardly be so ill-bred as to ask to see the form.

"Are you ready?" she inquired. "I'll just go upstairs for my hat."

"Do let me fetch it."

"You wouldn't know where it was, thank you."

There were telegraph forms in a pigeon-hole of Miss Todd's writing-desk opposite her bed. She extracted one and wrote an urgent, prepaid wire, inviting Mrs. Lawley to the Croft. As she was putting on a wide-brimmed hat a soft tapping sounded on the door.

"Is that you, Mary?" called Miss Todd. "Come in."

Not Mary, but Fanny Anderson appeared.

"Oh, dearest Emily, I was a little anxious. You've been upstairs quite a time, and I was afraid you might be feeling faint or have had a fall."

"Why on earth should I?"

"I could see how badly that Grier business had shaken you, dear. And it was very inconsiderate of Mr. Massey to suggest that you should walk down to the lodge with him on such a hot morning, and then that stuffy parlour and the old woman's lemonade—— Emily, don't you think it would be wiser not to go out again before lunch, certainly beyond the garden?"

"I told you I had something to do in the village."

"Couldn't one of the maids go, if you won't let me?"

"No. No, thank you. It'll be something to do." Miss Todd gulped. "Will you sit out, Fanny, or have a rest indoors? The drawing-room's nice and cool as it doesn't get the sun till the afternoon."

"Oh, but I'm coming with you. I'm longing to see Little Batnors."

"There's really nothing to see."

"And I love walking. I haven't had any proper exercise since we arrived. Just sitting and eating." Fanny gave a trill of laughter. "I'll get fat if I'm not careful."

"I'm sorry." Miss Todd's look was dismayed. "I didn't know you'd have liked a walk yesterday. It was so very hot that I thought you'd rather sit in the garden after Mr. Massey left."

"Of course, dearest. I found it so restful, but I'm feeling quite energetic to-day, so let's start, shall we?"

Fanny had put on her hat. Obviously she was determined to accompany Miss Todd. The latter clutched her handbag containing the telegram and followed Fanny meekly.

It was a heavy, oppressive day. Miss Todd and Fanny Anderson turned

out of the lodge-gates and took a road leading by a gradual descent to Little Batnors. The countryside looked flat and fallow. Ricks outside a rambling farm matched its greyish-yellow tints. Farther along the two crossed a sluggish stream by means of a plank bridge and walked down a muddy lane which eventually meandered into the village. This consisted of a huddle of low-roofed cottages, a baker's, the post office, and a kind of general stores which sold everything from brandy-balls to boots or pork sausages to pop-guns. Fanny paused, enchanted.

"What a quaint place, Emily! Humbugs! I haven't seen those for years."

"Shall we go in and buy some?"

"Oh, no, dear. You never know what they're made of—like Mrs. Grier's lemonade."

Fanny gave a little laugh, but the laugh had an edge to it. Miss Todd winced.

"I want to try and get another reel of this sewing-silk. Would you see whether they have one, Fanny—it doesn't matter if it's a darker blue—and I'll just go on to the post office?"

"I'll come too. I want some stamps."

"I put plenty in your room."

"I know, dearest Emily, but I don't like using yours."

"How absurd!"

"No. I'm rather independent about little things of that kind."

"I wish you'd ask for that reel."

"You'd much better choose it yourself. I'd feel so stupid if I bought the wrong shade."

In silent exasperation Miss Todd accompanied Fanny to the post office.

There were several other people inside, one of whom was Mrs. Karslake. She was buying a postal order. Miss Todd greeted her and Fanny followed suit. Under Mrs. Karslake's significant glance Miss Todd coloured.

"I hope your business won't take long, Emily," the doctor's wife began. "Poor Mrs. Rhodes is overwhelmed this morning, with only herself to attend to everything."

"I want to telegraph," murmured Miss Todd.

"Well, if the wire's written out—is it?—I'll send it off for you, if you like."

"Oh, thank you, Sybil."

"Then you needn't wait. I know Miss Anderson doesn't approve of your standing." A slightly malicious look embraced Fanny.

"I don't know how much it will be. Here's five shillings. I'll get the change another time. It's very good of you."

"Rubbish! That all?"

"All I want here, thank you."

"You said something about sewing-silk, dearest Emily?"

"Oh, yes. Did I give you back the pattern? No, it's in my bag. We'll see you soon, I hope, Sybil?"

"I'm making jam and this afternoon I've got to drive the doctor to Steeple Batnors. You might ring up this evening, Emily."

"Yes, I will."

Miss Todd and Fanny left the post office after Miss Todd had nodded and smiled in the direction of the busy postmistress.

"Poor Mrs. Rhodes! Her assistant's on holiday and she's got her hands full."

"I wonder Mrs. Karslake doesn't offer to help. That woman has her finger in every pie, it seems to me."

"Oh, no. Poor Sybil!"

"I thought it most officious the way she insisted on sending your telegram for you. Just an excuse to read it, I believe. Why couldn't you have let me wire for you and saved you this walk?"

"I—I didn't want to trouble you."

"You know it wouldn't have been a trouble." Fanny looked reproachful and misunderstood.

"Here's your change, Emily, and the telegram's gone off all right." Mrs. Karslake's rapid steps had overtaken the pair.

"Thank you very much, Sybil."

"I was just telling Emily that I could easily have run down with her wire."

"I'm sure you could, Miss Anderson; but Emily hasn't lost the use of her legs, has she?"

"I don't think it's very good for her, walking in this heat."

"She can take it slowly."

Miss Todd, strolling between Mrs. Karslake and Fanny whilst these two, rapidly becoming declared foes, discussed her as though she were not there, felt by turns angry, half-amused, and deeply grateful to Sybil for standing up for her. Really, the way Fanny tried to make her out a permanent invalid was quite ridiculous.

"I shan't melt, Fanny," she told her.

"Of course not, dearest Emily; but it isn't as though you had started fresh." Fanny turned to Mrs. Karslake. "Poor Emily's bound to be tired. Would you believe that that inconsiderate, tiresome trustee of hers, Mr. Massey, came over last night and kept her up late, and then was here again at ten o'clock this morning, and after all that insisted on her walking down to the lodge-gates with him?"

"Two visits from Mr. Massey yesterday and another to-day!" Mrs. Karslake laughed. "He must have had something very important to discuss with you, Emily."

"Just business," stammered Miss Todd.

"Most troublesome business," Fanny added. "It upset her badly, Mrs. Karslake, and then that long, hot walk, and the old woman who lives at the lodge forced her to go in and drink some stuff she called lemonade."

"Mrs. Grier? I know her lemonade. It's celebrated—isn't it, Emily?—and exactly the right drink for a broiling day like this. It is hot! The doctor was saying at breakfast that he thought we were going to have thunder."

"Lemonade's all very well." Fanny reverted obstinately to her grievance, despite the obvious red herring of Dr. Karslake's weather prognostications. "I consider that Emily needs building up after her recent illness, so we arranged that she was to drink a glass of wine every morning, and of course Mrs. Grier delayed us, and it didn't do Emily any good when she drank it."

"On top of lemonade? I should think not." Mrs. Karslake laughed.

"Oh, it wasn't so soon after the lemonade as all that, Sybil." Miss Todd's protest came nervously. "In any case, as I keep saying to Fanny, I don't want port."

"You need it, dearest Emily," Fanny reminded her firmly.

"I don't think that she does, Miss Anderson. Did your doctor at Derriford order it for you, Emily?"

"No. At least—— I didn't have a doctor."

"Oh! Was that wise?"

"I think so. I wasn't really seriously ill—just a nasty chill—and warmth and rest soon cured me, as well as Fanny's nursing."

"Nonsense, Emily! I did very little."

"Oh, indeed you did a great deal."

Miss Todd felt benevolent and grateful once more towards Fanny as she recalled how very, very kind Fanny had been. Surreptitiously she smiled at her. Mrs. Karslake intercepted the smile and, to Miss Todd's dismay, unmasked her batteries once more.

"If you weren't definitely ordered by a medical man to drink wine every morning, Emily, why do you do it? It's not a good habit, you know."

Miss Todd laughed nervously. "Yes, that's just what I said to Fanny."

"Oh, Miss Anderson arranged it, did she?" Mrs. Karslake's tone was almost openly contemptuous. Miss Todd flushed. It relegated Fanny so unmistakably to the realm of complete unimportance.

"Yes, I did arrange it, Mrs. Karslake." Fanny spoke decidedly.

"Why?"

"Why? Because I saw that Emily required building-up."

"She looks perfectly fit to me, except for being tired." Mrs. Karslake shrugged her shoulders. "On what grounds do you set up to be a judge of anybody's health, Miss Anderson? Are you, may I ask, a nurse of some kind?"

"No." Fanny's breath came hard. Miss Todd saw those red spots staining her cheeks and trembled. "No, I'm not a nurse."

"Or a doctor?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I must say I call it gratuitously interfering of you."

"Interfering? Oh!"

"Sybil! Fanny! Please, please——"

"Of course you're anxious that Emily should call in your husband—a doctor—and he'd be able to keep her dangling on, a semi-invalid, a wealthy patient. I expect Dr. Karslake misses her father, such a rich man ill for so long——"

"Well, upon my word!" Mrs. Karslake seemed undecided whether to be amused or angry. "I can't say that I looked upon the business in that light. As a matter of fact, Miss Anderson, Miss Todd has had such even and excellent health that she has not required to consult any doctor for years."

"Your husband was old Mr. Todd's doctor, Emily told me."

"He could do very little for him, but Mr. Todd liked his visits."

"And I dare say paid nicely for them," jeered Fanny.

"Emily, are you going to stand this?" Mrs. Karslake glanced at Miss Todd with deep significance.

"I think it's dreadful. I'm so sorry, Sybil. Fanny, don't you feel that you should apologize? Dr. Karslake was Papa's kind friend, and—and it wasn't ever a question of—of fees."

"Possibly not, but doctors always make a good thing out of a chronic

case where there's plenty of money." How ugly Fanny looked, sneering, her eyes half-closed, reflected poor Miss Todd. "As for apologizing——"

"You ought to. Insulting my husband whom you've never even seen!" Anger had chased any amusement from Mrs. Karslake's face.

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Really, Emily, you ought to take my part, your guest's, instead of siding with this woman. What business is it of hers that I happen to have formed the opinion that you are run down and require a daily glass of wine as treatment?"

Miss Todd remained helplessly silent. How stubborn Fanny was, how certain of her own rightness, how rigidly unbending in her refusal to admit herself in the wrong! First Grier and now Sybil Karslake. Poor Sybil! It was really terrible of Fanny to imply that Dr. Karslake had regarded dear Papa merely as a lucrative patient, one who could pay lavishly for advice and attendance, ripe to be exploited and utilized for the doctor's benefit. Dr. Karslake was never like that. From the first he had told both, first Papa and then herself, that Papa could not recover. It was only a question of time, of further strokes, and no treatment was of any use, but Papa enjoyed Dr. Karslake's visits, his cheery entrance into the sick-room, his bits of news, the sharing of old jokes between them. Tears sprang to her eyes. What could she do? Sybil had every right to be offended. If Fanny refused to express her regret——

"I said all along that I didn't want port every morning," Miss Todd began uncertainly.

"And you don't. Stuff and nonsense!" Mrs. Karslake laughed. "If Miss Todd is pulled down by her illness and not feeling up to the mark she ought to see a doctor, Miss Anderson. It need not necessarily be my husband."

"Oh, Sybil, as though I should ever have anybody except dear Dr. Karslake!" remonstrated Miss Todd. "I—I couldn't bear a strange doctor."

"You don't require one, dearest Emily." Fanny was smiling and honey-tongued once more. "There's nothing wrong, Mrs. Karslake, I do assure you, except a slight weakness and want of tone after being ill. Rest and freedom from worry and this little course of wine every morning for the present will soon put her right."

"Rest and freedom from worry are impossible just now." The deadly significance of Mrs. Karslake's words penetrated even Fanny's armour of self-confidence. The red spots returned. "As for the wine, I strongly advise you, my dear Emily, not to be bullied into drinking it if you don't want to."

"Who's bullying her?" Fanny inquired.

"Well, over-persuaded, if you like that better."

"I don't like either particularly. You seem to imply, Mrs. Karslake, that I forced Emily into doing what I thought was for her good."

"I've no doubt you didn't let her have her own way, Miss Anderson."

The uncomfortable discussion had brought all three to the plank bridge over the stream. As they exchanged farewells Miss Todd uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Oh, Fanny, I'm so sorry!"

"What for, dear?"

"You said you wanted some stamps. I quite forgot."

"It doesn't matter in the least. I haven't any letters I need write to-day."

"But it's so horrid to be without a stamp."

"There are plenty in my room, thanks to you."

"I thought you didn't like using those, though it's rather absurd."

"I don't. I told you——"

"Run back and get your stamps," urged Mrs. Karlake. "You know where the post office is. It won't take you five minutes."

"But you said the postmistress was dreadfully busy and under-staffed. It isn't fair to give her anything extra."

"Selling a few stamps is nothing. Good-bye again, Emily. I must get back to my jam-making."

Mrs. Karlake nodded and went briskly down the road in the opposite direction to the village. A bend and a clump of trees soon hid her from view.

"Are you sure you don't mind, dearest?" Fanny asked earnestly.

"Of course not. And don't hurry in this heat. I'll sit on that stile till you're back."

Fanny smiled and moved away. Miss Todd dawdled towards the stile. Before she had reached it, whilst Fanny's figure was dwindling in the distance, Mrs. Karlake suddenly reappeared.

"Sybil! How you startled me! I thought you'd gone."

"You didn't suppose I was going to lose an opportunity like this, did you?" Mrs. Karlake chuckled, then grew grave. "Emily, it's really terrible. Why don't you get rid of that woman?"

The two halted beside a group of elms over a gate. The field beyond was dry, harrowed. The sky, sullen, sunless, stooped above it. Not a breath of air stirred. Everything was stark, lifeless, windless. Miss Todd felt tired and defeated.

"F—Fanny?" she faltered.

"Certainly. Your precious Fanny. I took a great dislike to her yesterday, as you know, and I warned you fairly plainly to be careful."

"Yes, I know you did."

"She was on her good behaviour then, and pretty artful, but to-day—— It was outrageous the way she implied that the doctor had exploited Mr. Todd. And to bully you into drinking habits!" Mrs. Karlake gave an angry little laugh. "Has anything more happened, Emily? Why did Mr. Massey come so early to see you when he lunched with you only the day before?"

"Oh, it's been dreadful, Sybil. Somebody accused poor Grier of selling garden stuff behind my back."

"Somebody? Miss Anderson, of course."

"Well, yes, it was Fanny," Miss Todd admitted. "I was greatly upset."

"No wonder. Grier—of all people! Why, he's been at the Croft for years."

"Twenty-five or twenty-six at least. And Mrs. Grier's had the lodge all that time. Mr. Massey interviewed Grier and everything was quite satisfactorily explained. What Fanny saw was just produce from his own plot. There isn't the smallest objection to his selling what he and his mother can't use from that."

"And Miss Anderson admitted that she had been entirely mistaken and apologized to Grier, I suppose?"

"N-no. She was rather obstinate about it. There was a horrid scene

in the library. I don't know what I should have done without Mr. Massey. He asked me to walk down with him as far as the lodge, but Fanny came with us, so I had no opportunity——"

"Of asking his advice on how best to get rid of her," supplied Mrs. Karslake briskly. "You simply must, Emily. It's far worse than I thought."

"But how can I? I couldn't tell her to go."

"Well, if you don't, she'll stop on and on, and at this rate you soon won't have a friend or a servant left."

"Grier's staying."

"She's already deprived you of Timmins. I told you I was certain she was at the bottom of that business. The doctor thought it most unsatisfactory."

"Yes, I know, Sybil."

"She's failed with Grier—this time, anyway—but she'll try to oust Mrs. Crabbie and the rest. She did her best to pick a quarrel with me just now and force you to take her side. Fortunately I had the sense not to make too much of it, but I'm really very angry, Emily."

"Of course. You've every right to be. Fanny ought to apologize, only I'm afraid she won't."

"I don't want her apologies as long as she doesn't succeed in her aim, which, as I said just now, was plainly to force you to take her part and quarrel with me. What can you do? She's a perfect leech."

"I shan't be alone with her, I hope. That wire you kindly sent off for me was to Mrs. Lawley, inviting her to come at once and stay some time."

"Does Miss Anderson know that you've asked her?"

"No. I was so thankful you took the telegram, as otherwise she'd have come over to the counter and seen what I'd written."

"She won't like it if Mrs. Lawley does come."

"I can't help that. I daren't be alone with Fanny." Miss Todd's voice broke. "Oh, I know you'll think I'm a weak fool, Sybil, but it's awful the way she does what she wants with me. I feel like a rabbit facing a boa-constrictor. I daren't defy her."

"Well, it's all very unfortunate. Her motto seems to be *j'y suis, j'y reste!* Can Mr. Massey do nothing?"

"I—I shouldn't like to ask him."

"I hope you don't give her money." Mrs. Karslake's tone was sharp.

"Oh, no." Miss Todd coloured vividly. "At least—— She was my guest at the Woolpack for the last week or two, and of course I paid her railway fare coming here, but——"

"I don't see any 'of course'. Emily, I do entreat you not to let her borrow from you or get money out of you in any way. She's quite capable of it, it's my belief."

"I won't lend her any."

"You'd never see it again, and it would only give her another hold over you. No; when Mrs. Lawley comes things may be better, a third person there."

"I'm only afraid Fanny won't like her coming."

"Rubbish! If she says anything remind her that it's your house, not hers, and if she can't be civil to another visitor—an old friend—she can just go."

"I wish she would," Miss Todd declared fervently.

"I'd better be off before she comes back. Mrs. Lawley's answer ought to arrive some time this afternoon. Do ring up and tell me if it's all right."

"Yes, I will."

"And don't say anything to Miss Fanny about our having this little chat."

Mrs. Karslake nodded and went off. She was not a moment too soon as almost directly she had disappeared Fanny was seen hastening along the road. Her face, hot and mottled, sharpened with suspicion as she approached.

"Why aren't you sitting down, Emily?"

"Sitting on the stile, like Mary's lover?" Miss Todd laughed weakly.

"Has Mary a lover? I didn't know."

"It's a song." Fanny's ignorance scandalized Miss Todd.

"Oh! I thought you meant your housemaid. But why did you walk so far down the road? I wouldn't have left you if I'd thought you'd do anything so silly."

"Strolling a few yards isn't silly."

"Were you meeting someone?"

"Certainly not."

"Or talking to anybody?"

"Really, Fanny, have I to ask your permission to speak to a friend?"

"Nonsense, dearest Emily! I only meant that there was no necessity to tire yourself unnecessarily."

"Well, I didn't. Did you get your stamps?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Shall we go back, then?"

"I suppose we'd better."

Fanny's tone implied that Little Batnors was a dreary village where there was nothing to see or to do. Miss Todd flushed.

"The same way, or round by the road?"

"Whichever you prefer."

"I'd rather you chose."

"I don't mind a bit. Is the road longer?"

"Oh, yes. The bridge is a short-cut. How low the stream looks to-day! We want rain badly."

Exchanging similar improving platitudes Miss Todd and Fanny Anderson wended their way home to the Croft. At the lodge-gates they were met by Grier.

"'Ave you a minute, ma'am?" he asked. He and Fanny ignored one another.

"Yes, certainly, Grier. What is it?"

"Don't stand, dearest Emily," Fanny murmured.

"It's just to see the stuff for the cottage 'ospital, ma'am. I've got it all ready in the shed and I could take it over some time this afternoon."

"Oh, but I'm sure it's all right. Just send what you think would be best. I don't know what used to go. It had better be the same every week, I suppose."

"Very good, ma'am. I'll attend to it."

Grier slouched off, with a salute to Miss Todd and a glance, half-spiteful, half-triumphant, towards Fanny.

"That's settled," observed Miss Todd thankfully.

"What is? I don't wish to complain, Emily, but that man's manners——"

"Grier? What did he do?"

"He ignored me very pointedly and instead of touching his forehead going away he gave me a kind of leer. I can't describe it, but it was most objectionable."

"Oh, Fanny, I think you imagined that. As for taking any notice of you—— You know, dear, Grier thinks you quite misjudged him and rather resents your refusing to admit it."

"I did not. The man had a lot of stuff—your property—collected to sell, and when he heard that I was still suspicious (I dare say that old woman told him I'd asked to see the garden) he pretends that it's for the hospital. He knew that you'd swallow the story and not expect to see the amount, but I'm not so easily taken in. I thought he hurried away in a most furtive fashion, thoroughly guilty and hangdog."

By way of expostulation Miss Todd gave a feeble little laugh.

"Oh, no. Grier hasn't polished manners—Papa always admitted that—but if he's rather a rough diamond he's a treasure as a gardener. He does all the gardens and the hot-houses himself, with just a boy after school hours for things like weeding."

"I dare say. That gives him a free field."

Miss Todd checked an exasperated sigh. What use was it to argue with Fanny? Fanny was always right.

"Then you aren't going to do anything?" Fanny asked the question after a pause.

"No. Why should I? I'm satisfied, and you will please me very much, Fanny, if you won't refer to the subject again." Miss Todd halted and then continued with mounting courage: "I suppose you're bound to come across Grier occasionally as long as you're here, but you need have nothing to do with him."

"Oh, I don't mind for myself." Fanny spoke loftily. "It's only that I'm so angry on your account, dearest Emily, that creature robbing and exploiting and cheating you. It's a shame, especially when you're so generous, so unsuspecting."

"I hope I am, Fanny, only in any case I don't consider that Grier has done any of those things. But need we keep on talking about him? What did you think of our little village?"

"It was all right."

"I'm afraid you're disappointed, but I warned you, you remember, that Little Batnors was just a backwater."

"I don't mind that. I didn't expect anything else, but I must confess, Emily, that I had looked for some measure of politeness from your friends."

Fanny sounded mortally offended. Miss Todd shook her head.

"If you mean Sybil——"

"I was referring to Mrs. Karslake—yes."

"What did she do?"

"Emily! You can ask me that when you were there and heard how she insulted me!"

"I'm sorry, but I was there, you see, and I'm of opinion that it was the other way about."

"You imply that I insulted Mrs. Karslake?"

"Well, didn't you rather? After all, Fanny, she and her husband are

old friends, and as I told you he was Papa's doctor and very attentive and kind, and it was rather dreadful of you to say that he—he made money out of him."

"Did your father remember Dr. Karslake in his will?"

For a moment Miss Todd stood rooted to the broad sweep of gravel below the front-door steps. What a question for a mere acquaintance like Fanny to ask! The sheer, cool, impertinent curiosity prompting it horrified Miss Todd. Apparently Fanny misunderstood her silence.

"I'm afraid you didn't hear me, Emily. I asked you if Mr. Todd left Dr. Karslake any legacy."

"I heard you the first time, but I was wondering whether I need answer." Miss Todd's tone was cold, rebuking. "After all, it's hardly any concern of yours, is it?"

"A will's public property and anybody's business." Fanny's reply was sulky. "You can see it by paying a shilling at Somerset House, or else it's in all the papers. If you don't chose to answer me I can easily find out."

"But why should you want to? It's—it's extraordinary. What possible interest can Papa's will have for you?"

Miss Todd sounded genuinely amazed and puzzled. Fanny gave a queer little laugh.

"It hasn't any, except what I asked you about Dr. Karslake. If he was remembered in it, then it was very well worth his while to have kept in with Mr. Todd."

Fanny's unabashed vulgarity shocked Miss Todd. Fanny was a gentlewoman, a clergyman's daughter. Did clergymen's daughters talk like this? The doubt made her speak more coldly than before.

"There was no question of 'keeping in' with Papa. He and Dr. Karslake were great friends, apart from being doctor and patient. You might as well accuse Mr. Massey of being kind to me in the hope of a legacy."

"I suppose he got one from your father?"

"Fanny, I don't understand you." Miss Todd felt a sudden spur of exasperation. "What's happened to you that you start asking all these questions about Papa's will and how his money was left and Dr. Karslake and Mr. Massey benefiting?"

"Emily dearest, forgive me for saying so, but you do take rather a long time to see what's going on under your nose." Fanny gave her little chuckle and inserted her arm through Miss Todd's. "Don't you understand that I'm only trying to bring home to you how insulting Mrs. Karslake was just now?"

"But what has that to do with things like wills?"

"Only that of course she doesn't like your having a new friend who'll see through her."

Miss Todd repeated dazedly: "See through Sybil?"

"Yes. Didn't you notice how rudely she implied that I knew nothing about illness, and that paved the way for suggesting that you should call in her husband? I beg that you won't. He'll only persuade you that there's something wrong with you."

"It was you who said I had a heart, Fanny."

"So you have. I'm convinced of it. But Dr. Karslake would probably overlook that (it's incredible how stupid some doctors can be. They won't see what's as plain as print to a lay person), and find something else, and

make you into a semi-invalid before you know. You'd never shake him off."

Miss Todd had never shaken Fanny off. Thirty years. . . . Thirty years. . . .

"But I'm perfectly well now," she protested, "and there's no necessity for calling in Dr. Karslake."

"I'm glad to hear it. That wife of his asking if I were a nurse! And you took her part, Emily, instead of siding with me."

"Because I thought you were in the wrong, Fanny."

"I was not. I'm certain that you require building-up and that glass of port every morning is good for you. It was very interfering of Mrs. Karslake to set up her opinion against mine and persuade you not to have it."

"But I did, Fanny, just to please you, and it made me so sleepy."

"Why didn't you take a rest, as I suggested, instead of toiling to the village and back?"

"I wanted to telegraph."

"You wouldn't let me go for you."

"It was a—a private matter."

"And yet you allow that Karslake creature to snatch the form from you and send it off instead. Just an excuse to read it."

"Sybil didn't, and in any case it was nothing that affected her."

Fanny inquired sweetly: "What was it, dearest Emily? Something exciting?"

"No. Business."

"I thought Mr. Massey settled that."

"This was a—a suggestion of his. Please stop asking me questions, Fanny. You'll know in good time."

Miss Todd smiled to herself. Mrs. Lawley's reply—in all probability an acceptance—might arrive during the early afternoon. Once she was but-tressed and braced by the prospect of a third party to break up this wearisome *tête-à-tête* with Fanny she would feel better able to cope with her. If Fanny were disagreeable, resentful, disinclined to be pleasant to the other guest Miss Todd might find courage to tell her that, in this case, the remedy was in her own hands and she could leave the Croft. Only—— Would Miss Todd find the courage? Would Fanny take the hint and go?

Fanny was no fool. Apparently she realized from Miss Todd's mild snubbing that she had gone too far. She changed the subject with ease and speed and began to talk about the neighbourhood. Had not dearest Emily said that Market Batnors was quite a little town?

"Yes. I must take you there. The old church is lovely and there are some fairly good shops."

"How do we get so far? Oh, I think you said there were buses."

"They're not very comfortable. We might drive over in the pony-trap and have tea at the Wheatsheaf."

"I'd love that, only hadn't we better wait till it's a little cooler? I'm so anxious that you shouldn't do too much."

"That wouldn't be very strenuous."

Miss Todd smiled. Fanny smiled back. When she was like this, docile, agreeable, interested, she reminded Miss Todd of the Fanny of the Woolpack Inn. This new aggressive, inquisitive, managing Fanny was like a changeling. All hung on Mrs. Lawley's acceptance. If she came, Fanny might devote

her overpowering attentions and incessant inquiries to her for a change. Miss Todd felt rather mean at thus exposing an old friend to Fanny's impertinences, but Mrs. Lawley, reticent, dignified, was more than likely to prove a match for Fanny Anderson. It was only a fool like herself whom Fanny made so helpless. . . .

"A quarter to one!" Fanny exclaimed. "How the morning's flown!"

"We didn't hurry, walking back. Are you ready for lunch at half-past one, Fanny?"

"Quite, dear. I hope you're hungry?"

Fanny went into the morning-room and to Miss Todd's relief sat down to an earnest perusal of *The Times*, recently arrived. Miss Todd announced that she was going upstairs to tidy herself and they would meet at lunch. Her room felt cool, inviting, restful, after the glare outside and Fanny's exhausting company. The ordeal of lunch, the afternoon, the evening, lay like a pall on Miss Todd's spirits. How was Fanny to be amused? Before coming to the Croft she had announced emphatically that she neither expected nor required entertainment, but here she seemed resourceless, unoccupied, needing, if not demanding, Miss Todd's constant attendance, and yet critical, easily vexed, exigent, exacting. Miss Todd sighed.

The dining-room had partly-lowered blinds and the delicate scents of sweet peas in a bowl on the sideboard and a vase in the centre of the table. Fanny was tactfully admiring of the mauve, pink, and petunia beauties. Miss Todd felt grateful to her for not referring to Grier in connection with the flowers. Half-way through the second course Miss Todd heard a ring at the front door. She shivered slightly, then sat erect once more. Taylor, who had gone out, came back. An orange envelope lay on the silver salver she proffered.

"A telegram!" Fanny ejaculated. "I can't understand why people are afraid of them. You never know what nice thing mayn't be inside."

Miss Todd murmured an absent agreement. "Will you excuse my opening this, Fanny?"

"Of course, dearest."

"There's no answer, please tell the boy, Taylor."

"Yes, ma'am."

Miss Todd had braced herself for a blunt question from Fanny as to the telegram's contents, if not a plain demand to be shown it, but to her surprise Fanny did not even allude to the missive. She went on eating her lunch. Her hostess decided to postpone the evil hour. When they were drinking their coffee she might tell Fanny. . . .

"We'll have coffee in the drawing-room, I think, Taylor," she informed the maid. "You didn't have any yesterday, Fanny, because you wanted to leave me free to talk to Mr. Massey, but you will take it to-day, won't you?"

"I've had a very good lunch, dear."

"Still—— Just to keep me company?"

"Oh, well, if you put it in that way, I suppose I must."

Fanny leaned across and stroked Miss Todd's hand as it lay on the table. The action, her little nod, her words all seemed to imply and emphasize that Fanny was about to drink coffee solely and entirely to oblige Miss Todd. She did not want coffee. Had she been left the choice she would have preferred not to take any. Dearest Emily ought to be very grateful.

Dearest Emily was not. She felt considerably exasperated. If Fanny

had no liking for coffee she could have said so and declined any. As she had mentioned, she had had a very good lunch. To give Miss Todd the impression that she was choking down a fluid personally nauseating to her simply in order that her hostess must not be disappointed by her polite refusal of it was too absurd.

The couple went towards the drawing-room, Miss Todd's waist encircled by Fanny's arm. Fanny hovered round Miss Todd, establishing her behind the coffee-table, supplying her with a cushion and footstool, but she did not suggest, as she had done after dinner the previous evening, that she should pour out. Miss Todd was allowed to wield her own Georgian coffee-pot, after Fanny had ascertained that it was not too heavy.

"You've such small hands, Emily, like a little girl's."

"Oh, nonsense! Will you put in sugar for yourself?"

"Thank you."

Miss Todd had slipped the telegram into the front of her black blouse. Surreptitiously her fingers touched it. What joy it brought, what certainty, what pleasurable anticipations of future peace! Mrs. Lawley had wired gratitude and acceptance. She would arrive in time for lunch next day.

Only the afternoon, the evening, the following morning to be endured. Should Miss Todd keep Fanny in ignorance of the impending visitor? On the one hand it seemed rather brutal to spring it on her within a few hours of Mrs. Lawley's advent that Mrs. Lawley was expected, but if told now Fanny might actually bully and persuade Miss Todd into putting the guest off. She was quite capable of it. Miss Todd decided to wait.

"What would you like to do this afternoon?" she asked.

"Anything you wish, dearest Emily."

"Isn't that rather indefinite?"

"Oh, no. There's not very much we can do, is there?"

Fanny's tone was airily impertinent. Miss Todd felt as though she had been slapped in the face. She burnt her boats.

"I'm sorry you're finding it so dull, but you won't have much more of me alone."

"I love being with you, just ourselves."

"Oh! I was afraid it was stupid for you. My old friend Mrs. Lawley has just telegraphed that she's arriving to-morrow, so there'll be three of us."

Miss Todd poured herself out another cup of coffee. She felt that she needed its stimulus.

"Mrs. Lawley?"

"Yes. I've told you about her, haven't I?"

"I think you mentioned her. Wasn't her husband the rector at Little Batnors?"

"Clever Fanny to remember! He died two years ago and she left, but she keeps up with old friends here, and it was always a promise that she should pay me a visit. Of course, latterly, with Papa's illness I couldn't ask anybody to stay."

"No, of course not."

How quietly Fanny had taken it! She did not even seem greatly interested. Miss Todd felt deeply thankful and relieved.

"I'm sure you'll like her. You'll have so much in common. She's a clergyman's widow and you're a clergyman's daughter. I dare say you'll find mutual friends." Miss Todd's nervous sentences trailed off into silence.

Fanny was so unnaturally, unusually quiet. No questions, no sneering little remarks. What was behind the smooth mask of her face?

"Emily?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Will you do me a great favour?"

"If—if I can, of course."

"Well, then—— Please don't tell your friend Mrs. Lawley about my father having been a clergyman."

"Certainly I won't, Fanny, if you'd rather not."

"I'd much rather not. There are—there are reasons."

"Please, Fanny, don't think you have to explain to me. It's none of my business. Mrs. Lawley will just be told that we met at Derriford, and I may mention how very good you were to me there, mayn't I?"

"Oh, if you like, but I really did very little. Thank you, dearest,"

Fanny was looking positively relieved. Miss Todd felt slightly puzzled, both by the request and Fanny's manner, but, as she had just said, it was no business of hers. There might have been some painful episode in the career of Fanny's father which naturally she did not wish to come to Mrs. Lawley's knowledge. Such things did happen. Or perhaps Fanny was sensitive because her father in his unworldliness had not provided better for her.

"There's nothing to thank me for," Miss Todd protested. "And Mrs. Fanny never asks anything, so you needn't be afraid——"

Miss Todd paused. Fanny was looking very strangely at her.

"Do you intend to insult me, Emily?"

"I—I don't understand."

"You implied that I had a—a past, something I was ashamed of, that I didn't want Mrs. Lawley to know about."

"Oh, Fanny, you know I never meant anything of the kind."

"It sounded like it."

"I'm very sorry."

"You ought to be."

Miss Todd sat gazing miserably at Fanny—Fanny once more indisputably right.

"Please forgive me, dear."

"It isn't a question of forgiveness, Emily. You have hurt me cruelly, but then I suppose you feel that you're in a position to sneer at me, so rich and—and secure——"

Was Fanny weeping? She had turned away and her shoulders heaved. Miss Todd felt appalled by her own clumsiness, her tactless disregard of poor Fanny's sensibilities. What was she to do? This recalled the scene in the train. . . .

Feebly she reiterated: "You know I didn't mean that."

Fanny utilized a handkerchief ostentatiously.

"It was very cruel of you. To hint—— To imply—— Oh!"

"But I didn't, Fanny. I—I assure you that I never did."

"What did you mean, then?"

"Nothing. I said you and Mrs. Lawley might know some of the same people—clergymen or their wives—and you told me you'd rather I didn't say anything to her about your being a clergyman's daughter."

"Yes, and then you said Mrs. Lawley never asked questions and I needn't be afraid. Afraid of what?"

Miss Todd said blankly: "Nothing. I only meant that everybody doesn't want a stranger to know every single thing about them."

"That implies that I've something to hide, something I'm ashamed of"

"No. No, Fanny dear. Of course you haven't."

"All the same, Emily, I believe you think I have."

Miss Todd repeated faintly: "No, Fanny."

"If you're going to suspect me, believe I'm an adventuress, out to 'do' you, I'd better go. In any case, with Mrs. Lawley here, an old friend that you know all about"—Fanny ground her teeth—"I shall be quite superfluous."

"Indeed you won't. Mrs. Lawley is not—not young and likes to take things easily. You and I'll have our walks and little outings just the same. You mustn't think of leaving me like this. I'm sure you'll like each other."

"She won't like me. None of your friends do." Fanny's tone was mournful. "Mr. Massey disliked me from the very first, and that hateful Mrs. Karslake detests me, and that Grier, oh! and all your servants—they're downright uncivil."

"I'm very sorry, Fanny. Perhaps, as you suggested, they got rather into slack ways when I was at Derriford, and it'll take a little time before the machinery runs smoothly again."

"Have you told them that Mrs. Lawley is coming to stay?"

"No. I thought I'd wait till this evening. There's no hurry, as she won't be here before to-morrow."

Fanny smiled. She seemed to have forgotten her grievance against Miss Todd, the imagined insult, and was her usual rather critical, slightly contemptuous self.

"You do let them ride roughshod over you, don't you, dearest Emily? I believe you're afraid to tell Mrs. Crabbie that you're having another visitor."

Miss Todd flushed.

"We're not accustomed to visitors, Fanny, but I'm sure Mrs. Crabbie won't mind. She's known Mrs. Lawley for years—all the time her husband was the rector."

"And will receive her with open arms? I see. It's only strangers with pasts—like myself—that she resents having here."

"Oh, Fanny, don't be silly!" Miss Todd spoke with some temper. "Nobody ever thought you had a past."

"You hinted that I had. Oh, well, the remedy's in your own hands. Hadn't I better go before Mrs. Lawley comes?"

Afterwards Miss Todd realized that her whole future had hung upon her answer. If only she had gathered her courage, told Fanny quietly that it might be a wise thing if she left, hinted at a return visit on some unspecified date, and—— It was no use thinking of that now, no use regretting. She had felt utterly incapable of saying the words which would acquiesce in Fanny's suggestion of departing from the Croft, and Fanny took her silence for the implication that she must remain.

"Dearest Emily! I believe that you don't want to part with me. Of course I'll stay, and I feel sure I'll get on with Mrs. Lawley. I'm accustomed to be with an old lady, you know. You remember? I told you."

"Oh, yes. You tried to live with one once, but her horrid nephew wanted to marry you. I remember perfectly."

"I shouldn't have said anything about it." Fanny's eyelids were lowered. "Oh, not about being a companion. I'm not in the least ashamed of that. But Mrs. Bayley's nephew—— Please keep that to yourself."

"Certainly. Now, you're sure everything's all right again, Fanny? You've forgiven me for being so tactless and stupid, only truly that wasn't what I meant."

"No, dear, of course not."

Miss Todd kissed Fanny and Fanny kissed Miss Todd. When they sat down again the former had an uneasy sensation that a door had swung ajar, but she had slammed and bolted it with her own hands. Why could she not have taken Fanny at her word? Fanny had offered to go. It might have meant unpleasantness, with Fanny injured, affronted, nursing an outside grievance, but if it rid Miss Todd of her——

Too late—far, far too late. Fanny was more securely established than ever, and poor Miss Todd had only herself to thank for the fact. She must never tell Mr. Massey that Fanny had suggested leaving. He would think Miss Todd weak, stupid, unable to seize an advantage or an opportunity, remind her that he had advised her to get rid of Fanny, and she disregarded his advice. Miss Todd's spirits sank. Already Fanny was a bone of contention between herself and Mr. Massey, and a cause of dissension between Miss Todd and Mrs. Karslake. Would she succeed in alienating Miss Todd from Mrs. Lawley? Her lost opportunity danced before her tantalizingly. Aha! it seemed to say. You won't get a second chance. Fanny offered to go. Why, you fool, didn't you take her at her word and let her?

Why, indeed? Miss Todd was unable to explain to herself, much less to another person. All she felt was summed up in her protesting answer to Mr. Massey: "I can't be rude."

But Fanny offered to go, her uneasy common sense reminded her. It was not like asking her to do so. Miss Todd gulped and tried to dismiss the realization of her culpable blindness and stupidity. After all, supposing she had accepted Fanny's offer of departing, an offer plainly born of temper, in all likelihood Fanny would have withdrawn it. Playfully she would declare that she was joking, that she knew her dearest Emily did not want to part with her, and they were quite happy and reconciled again. Once more Fanny was victorious. As invariably after a contest of this description Miss Todd had been put incontestably in the wrong and felt compelled to make amends. She smiled nervously.

"Oh, Fanny, I was wondering——"

"Yes, dearest. You were wondering what?"

"About my clothes. You see, I'm in mourning, and as dear Papa had rather old-fashioned ideas about respect for the dead and so on—I mean old-fashioned to quite a number of people, but I think they're rather nice—I shall be wearing black for a good while yet, I expect."

"Of course. You look very sweet in it too. But, Emily"—Fanny's tone was puzzled—"you've got all your mourning, haven't you? Surely you don't want my advice about more? In any case you've such good taste."

"Thank you, Fanny." Miss Todd laughed. "Oh, no, I've plenty of black clothes. What I was wondering about is my coloured ones. They'll all be out of date by the time I can wear them again."

"I suppose so. Not that fashions change as much as all that. But if

you don't want to keep the things, why not give them away? There are dozens of charitable societies who'd be thankful to get them."

"I know. I dispose of a good deal that way every year, only I meant— Fanny, promise me you won't be offended?"

"Offended? Why, how could I be? What are you trying to say, you shy person?"

"Just— Would you look over the clothes with me and—and accept anything that you might find of use?"

"Oh, Emily!"

"I'm sure my size would fit you. There's a blue dress I've only worn once when I put it on to show Papa. I'd love you to have that. And I never had on a navy coat and skirt Sybil Karslake suggested my buying one day we were in Steeple Batnors."

"Does Mrs. Karslake choose your clothes?"

Fanny sounded unconcernedly amused. Miss Todd coloured.

"Oh, no; but I'm not very sure of myself when it comes to buying anything." She hurried on. "And there are one or two coats and some brown gloves. We take the same size, don't we?"

"Yes, but, Emily——"

"Please, Fanny, don't refuse, or I shall think I've hurt your feelings. Would you care to come up now and look at the things?"

"I'd love to see them, but I don't know about taking any of them."

"I hope you'll find something you like. Come along. This is going to be fun." Miss Todd felt quite girlish and excited as she and Fanny went upstairs.

Mary was not in the room. Miss Todd had thought, rather uneasily, that she might be, and if so, whether it would be awkward dislodging her. She opened the large wardrobe and took out several dresses, depending from lavender-scented padded hangers, and some coats. Fanny was soon persuaded to try these on. They fitted astonishingly well and Miss Todd begged her to accept them. Fanny demurred, but in the end took everything she was offered.

"Those sleeves are a tiny bit long for you," Miss Todd decided. "I'll get Mary to take them up, shall I? And she can shorten that pleated skirt. You're smaller than I, Fanny, though the frock really might have been made for you."

"It's very kind of you, dearest Emily, but I don't like to trouble your maid."

"Oh, she hasn't much to do. I wish Timmins could have done it. She was a beautiful dressmaker."

Miss Todd sighed. The ghost of Timmins, prim, respectable, hovered about. No; she wasn't Timmins any longer, and yet how impossible to think of her as Mrs. Bowles. Fanny gathered up her spoils, scattering thanks and appreciation.

"You're too generous, Emily. Are you certain you don't want any of these?"

"Oh, quite, dear. As I told you downstairs I shall wear mourning for some time, and they were just filling up my wardrobe, perfectly useless. Look how roomy it is now."

"I'm simply delighted with everything. You darling!"

Fanny tripped away, her arms piled. Miss Todd felt curiously light-

hearted. If Fanny intended to make a long stay she would never have accepted clothes which she could hardly wear in the house and neighbourhood where anybody must recognize their origins. Everything would be all right. Mrs. Lawley was coming. Probably she and Fanny would agree quite amicably, and perhaps after another week Fanny was certain to announce her intention of departing. This time Miss Todd would not press her to remain.

She called out to Fanny that she meant to have a little rest before tea. Fanny replied gaily that she was perfectly happy over her new possessions and dearest Emily was not to worry about her. Were they to have tea in the garden? How delightful! Miss Todd curled up on her bed and fell asleep.

She awoke with a start. Her watch said half-past four. Fanny would think her lazy and neglectful. Miss Todd tidied herself, put on a garden hat, and went downstairs. In the hall she encountered Taylor and started apprehensively. Was Fanny right, and had Taylor a permanently sulky expression? Certainly she wore one now.

"Oh, Taylor, I'm afraid I'm rather late." Miss Todd spoke nervously.

"It's twenty-five minutes to five, ma'am."

"Yes. I was resting and I must have dropped asleep. Do you know where Miss Anderson is?"

"She's in the garden, ma'am."

"Oh! Well, we might have tea out there, I think."

"Miss Anderson has already ordered it, ma'am."

"She—she ordered tea?"

"Yes, ma'am." Taylor's face and voice were equally wooden, but Miss Todd quailed. "She came downstairs at four and rang the drawing-room bell. When I answered it she said that you told her you'd be having tea in the garden and I was to bring it out to the lawn under the copper beech."

"Oh! Oh, I see. She asked me upstairs where tea would be and I—I said the garden, so I suppose she thought she'd better tell you as I wasn't down. We always have tea at four."

"I am quite aware of that, ma'am." Taylor coughed. "If you please, is it by your wish that Mrs. Crabbie and the rest of the staff takes orders from Miss Anderson?"

"No. Of course not. I—I'd be much obliged, though, Taylor, if you would do as she says as long as she's here."

"And how long is that likely to be, ma'am, may I ask?"

"I—I don't know," whispered Miss Todd.

"Because it's not a very comfortable arrangement, ma'am, having two mistresses, so to speak."

Two mistresses! At this rate there would soon be only one and that one indisputably Fanny Anderson. Silently Miss Todd yearned after her missed opportunity.

"Is it, ma'am?"

"No. I know it isn't, Taylor, but only for the present——"

"Well, ma'am, I may put up with it to oblige you, but if it lasts too long either I go or Miss Anderson does."

"Oh, Taylor! You can't desert me. Timmins has gone, and if you do I'll feel so—so lost."

Miss Todd's appeal, her incipient tears, did not soften Taylor.

"If you want me to stop, ma'am, the remedy's in your own hands. You'll have to get rid of Miss Anderson. And it's not only me. Mary——"

"Oh, what about her?"

"Miss Anderson rang her bedroom bell, when you were upstairs. Mary thought you'd been taken ill and hurried up and Miss Anderson came out of her room and said you were resting and she didn't want you disturbed, and would Mary do a few little jobs for her?"

"What—what kind of jobs?"

"Sewing, ma'am. She showed her a whole lot of clothes she'd been given by you, and wanted Mary to alter this and shorten that and take in the other and change the trimming on something else. Mary will speak to you about it, because as she says she never undertook to do dressmaking for Miss Anderson."

"No. Oh, I know she didn't, Taylor, but it's all my fault really. You know everything I had before I went into mourning is just useless, and I asked Miss Anderson to accept a coat or two and a dress, and I suggested that if anything needed a little alteration Mary might do it, but——"

"You may have told Miss Anderson you'd get Mary to shorten a skirt or fasten a button, ma'am, but all she expects'll take weeks." Taylor sniffed. "As for giving her 'a coat or two and a dress'—— Why, ma'am, Mary says she's got pretty nearly everything you had in the wardrobe that wasn't black."

"I gave them to her. We're much of a size and it seemed a pity to waste the clothes."

"They wouldn't have been wasted, ma'am. You always gave away a lot and to people I dare swear are a sight more deserving than Miss Anderson."

"They'll be useful to her, Taylor. She isn't well off."

"Oh, she knows which side her bread's buttered."

Miss Todd shuddered. Taylor in this mood, insolent, aggrieved, really terrified her. She said faintly:

"I'll speak to Miss Anderson and tell her Mary has other work, but might put in a few stitches. I'm sure Mary won't mind. Will you bring tea now, please? I'm sorry I'm so late."

Taylor walked off and Miss Todd tottered out to the garden. Fanny sat under the copper beech, presiding over the tea-table. Miss Todd was too deflated to do more than collapse into a chair and repeat her regret for her unpunctuality.

"I dropped asleep and I was horrified when I woke to find how late it had got. I wish you'd gone on with tea, Fanny."

"Oh, no, dear. It doesn't matter at all. I said to Taylor that you had said we were going to have tea in the garden and she brought the tray out, but I told her that of course I'd wait for you."

"I saw Taylor and asked her to bring tea at once."

"That'll be lovely. I'm thirsty."

Taylor stalked across the grass, carrying kettle and teapot.

"Thank you, Taylor."

"Shall I pour out, dearest Emily? You look tired, in spite of your nice little nap."

"Oh, will you? Have your own tea first, though. I'm not in any hurry."

Taylor had gone indoors again, but the essence of her wrath and disapproval seemed to linger in the air.

"I wonder you keep that disagreeable woman, Emily."

"Taylor?"

"Yes. The way she looks at me—I feel undressed or not respectable, or as though I had no business to be staying with you."

"I think you imagine it, Fanny. She doesn't mean it. And I expect she was annoyed because I was late for tea. We always have it at four o'clock, you know."

"Isn't that rather absurd? After all, you're the mistress of the house, and tea, anyway, is a movable feast."

"I—I don't know. I suppose I got into the way of always being punctual with Papa, and the servants work better if one keeps strictly to time."

"I don't agree with you. It's not as though you had appointments or business. You ought to be able to take your own time."

"Perhaps I'm fussy. All old maids are."

"Well, now that you're home, if I were you I should insist on having meals when it suited me and not when it fitted in with the convenience of your servants. You stand up to them, Emily, and you'll soon see they'll do just as you wish."

Would they? With difficulty Miss Todd refrained from reminding Fanny of Timmins. Asserting herself there had had disastrous results.

"Try this cake," she suggested diffidently.

"Thank you. What a hungry place this is! I always seem to have a good appetite. I suppose it's something in the air."

"I've no idea. Little Batnors is considered to be rather low-lying and damp. In summer it can be very stuffy sometimes."

"It was hot in the village this morning," Fanny admitted.

Miss Todd nibbled bread-and-butter and wondered aloud how soon she had better break the news of Mrs. Lawley's advent to Mrs. Crabbie.

"I'll tell her if you like, dearest Emily," Fanny offered obligingly.

"Oh, there's no necessity, thank you." Miss Todd shuddered from a vision of an interview between Fanny and Mrs. Crabbie in which Fanny laid down the law and denounced any of Mrs. Crabbie's objections as impertinences. "I'll see her some time this evening and break it to her."

"Break it to her"! Really, Emily, you must be firmer. Does Mrs. Crabbie actually object to your inviting a visitor?"

"I don't know. It's so long since anybody stayed here."

"Until I came?"

"Yes, but that was different. I just wrote and told Mrs. Crabbie that you were coming back with me. It—it wasn't the same thing as telling her to her face."

"Did you give her any orders, directions about a bedroom for your guest, I mean?"

"No." Miss Todd remembered her annoyance at finding on their arrival that Mrs. Crabbie had installed Fanny next door to herself.

"Then that accounts for it."

"Accounts for what? Won't you try one of these chocolate biscuits?"

"No, thank you. I've had a lovely tea."

"But what did you mean by saying that?"

"Only because it accounted for my bedroom."

"Your bedroom? What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing, dearest, except that it was quite obviously an inferior room, not the best spare bedroom."

"But, Fanny—— Oh, I'm so sorry, only I expect Mrs. Crabbie thought you might like being next door to me, and the view's lovely, the rose-garden just below, and the hills."

"I dare say, but I'm not in the habit of gaping out of the window. I'm sure you didn't intend to hurt my feelings, Emily, by giving me an inferior room, especially as you say that Mrs. Crabbie arranged it to suit herself, only I can't help feeling the slight."

Fanny folded her hands in her lap and gazed reproachfully at Miss Todd.

"Oh, Fanny! I'd no idea—— Would you like to change?"

Fanny considered the proposition in silence. What is she plotting? wondered the nearly distraught Miss Todd.

"Where shall you be putting Mrs. Lawley?" Fanny asked.

"I don't know. Mrs. Crabbie had better decide."

"Couldn't we go in presently and you show me the other bedrooms?"

"But why? Some of them are shut up, the furniture all covered over, and I don't intend to use them for the present."

"All the same I'd like to see them. I love going over houses, although I've no home of my own." Fanny sighed deeply.

"We can, if you like, but I always think empty rooms are rather ghostly. There's poor Papa's room—— I've left it just as he had it, and I can hardly bear to go into it yet. The nurses had the other two bedrooms."

"Are they ready to be occupied?"

"Yes. I wonder which Mrs. Lawley would like. One's next door to Papa's and the other opposite."

"I'm longing to see them," Fanny declared.

"Well, if you've finished your tea, shall we go in now?"

Fanny expressed instant approval of the suggestion and with a sigh Miss Todd left her comfortable chair, the shade cast by the copper beech, and went with her across the dry glare of the lawn. She felt very tired. All that business with the clothes and Fanny, she supposed, and now Fanny, active, energetic, executive, was prepared to explore the entire house from attic to basement, to examine every inch of each room, and to comment upon, criticize, or condemn anything which failed to meet with her approbation. Again Miss Todd sighed.

"If you're too tired we could easily wait until after dinner," Fanny told her.

"Oh, no, thank you. This is as good a time as any. I'm not really tired." Miss Todd lied valiantly. "I always feel limp when the weather's hot. Is it very relaxing in Derriford about this time?"

"I don't know. I've usually been there in the autumn or the spring."

"Oh, I thought you lived there."

"No."

It was only a monosyllable, spoken quietly, in no way discourteously, yet to Miss Todd it sounded like a door slamming. Fanny's face, when she stole a troubled, puzzled glance at it, was inscrutable. Had she vexed her? Was it a mistake to have mentioned Derriford? But why? And surely Fanny had implied, if not in words, then indirectly, that her home had been at Derriford and her father a clergyman on the staff of the cathedral there? It all seemed very strange.

"You thought the house looked large, but it's really only two storeys and a basement," she explained hurriedly. "There are some attics, but we

just store things like old trunks and boxes of books there. I haven't been up to them for ages. The stairs are so steep."

"Very wise, dearest Emily. It would be bad for your heart."

"Oh, it isn't that. But there's nothing to go up for."

"Still, it's nice to have plenty of storage space."

"Yes. Now, you've seen my room, of course, and there's your own, and that was Papa's. We needn't go in, need we?"

"I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world, dear, but you mustn't allow yourself to get morbid. I'll just take a peep." Fanny opened the door. "Oh, Emily, what a fine room! It's a shame not to make use of it."

"But what can I do with it? There are three other bedrooms—two empty, and the one you're in—and it's much better to leave it as it is."

"I don't think so. It has an even finer view than from my window, and all that lovely old furniture—— Spanish mahogany, isn't it?"

"Is it? I'm afraid I don't know."

"Well, anyway, it's beautiful and ought not to be wasted."

Miss Todd's mouth quivered ominously.

"Papa died in that bed. He was ill so long in this room that I can't bear to think of anybody else using it."

"Emily dearest, that's a most unwholesome way of looking at things. Your father is better off. It's nothing but a morbid whim to keep it as he had it. It ought to be turned out, papered and painted——"

"Oh, no, Fanny. I love that paper with the rosebuds and true-lovers' knots. I know it's faded, but Papa chose it for Mamma—their room—when he married her, and after she died he never would have it changed."

"So that's where you get your funny ideas from? Well, don't change it, but I do think this room ought to be used again. Why not put Mrs. Lawley here?"

"No. The room at the end of the corridor or the one opposite will be best."

"May I see them?"

"Certainly. I was wondering whether you would like to change your present room for either."

Miss Todd proffered the suggestion with an anxious hope. If Fanny elected to move her quarters she would not be so immediately next to Miss Todd's bedroom. Even Fanny a few yards further off was preferable to Fanny only divided from Miss Todd by a wall.

"I don't know, dearest Emily."

"You said in the garden that you were disappointed in your room."

"Oh, no." Fanny's protest sounded genuinely horrified. "All I said was that it was an inferior room, and so it is."

"Inferior to what? My bedroom's smaller."

"I meant inferior to your father's room, for instance."

"You hadn't seen it when you said that."

Fanny slid out of the dilemma with graceful adroitness.

"I've seen it now and I consider it much, much nicer than my bedroom."

"It may be bigger, but I don't like the view over the front door and the drive. You can see hardly any of the garden, and the country is so flat."

Fanny had won her way. Always she did. Eventually she manoeuvred Miss Todd out of her own room into Papa's and retained triumphant possession herself of the best spare bedroom. Of course Fanny had been

right—she always was—about its being morbid to keep the room unoccupied and exactly as Papa had had it, but to Miss Todd it held almost sacred associations, quite apart from her life with Fanny Anderson, and she did not want to sleep there.

She was in it now, lying in bed, and it was the day of Fanny's funeral. "Well, anyway, do show me the other rooms, dear."

Miss Todd opened the door of each mechanically. The rooms were ready for occupation, and the old furniture, the colour schemes, the view drew forth exclamations of delighted admiration from Fanny. She thought that Mrs. Lawley would like the room with the lace bedspread. Miss Todd considered that the other, which had a bathroom next door to it, might be more convenient. Perhaps—she made the suggestion rather helplessly—Mrs. Crabbie's had better be the deciding voice.

"Then why don't you ring for her, tell her about Mrs. Lawley, and say definitely which bedroom you wish to be got ready?" demanded Fanny.

"Now? Oh, but she'll be busy with dinner. It's nearly six. And there's no hurry."

"Emily, you know quite well that you're just putting off telling her as long as you can. If you wait until after dinner you'll say that you don't like to disturb her, and in the end you'll go to bed without telling her."

"To-morrow'll do perfectly."

"To-morrow will not do. The bell's just beside you."

Miss Todd jerked feebly at the old-fashioned bell-pull. The tassel was dusty and she stared in dismay at her fingers.

"There! You see." Fanny looked over with malicious satisfaction. "Inches thick in dust. That shows the way Mrs. Crabbie keeps the house after pretending to you that she'd cleaned it thoroughly when you were away."

"Oh, she did, Fanny. Everything's spotless."

"Is it? Look at your hands."

"Dust collects on a thing like a bell-pull."

"Then it oughtn't do. And I dare say you'd find more if you looked under the bed or behind the chest-of-drawers."

"I'm not going to. I'm sure the floor's perfectly clean. And—and please, Fanny, don't say anything to Mrs. Crabbie about the—the dust. It isn't her work."

"Whose is it?"

"Mary's or Taylor's, I suppose."

"Well, all I can say is, that if four women can't even keep one room clean—— You know it's not clean, only you won't admit it. Here's Rose. Miss Todd rang for you, Rose."

Rose glared at Fanny. Fanny retreated to the window with an odd little laugh. The room, unused, unoccupied for some time, felt suddenly chill, airless. Miss Todd shivered.

"Is Mrs. Crabbie busy, Rose?" she murmured.

"I think she's cooking the dinner, ma'am. I haven't been down to the kitchen very lately. I was laying the table and polishing the silver in my pantry."

"Oh, yes."

"Did you want to speak to her, ma'am? I dare say she could leave whatever she's doing."

"I—— It can wait, but if she wasn't too busy you might see if she would come up, please."

"Here, ma'am?"

"Yes. I—I want to tell her about something."

Miss Todd's voice died away ineffectively. Fanny, motionless by the window, said nothing. Rose went out.

"Oh, dear! I know she won't like coming upstairs. Fanny, I do think it would be better for me to go down after dinner and just explain to her that Mrs. Lawley's expected. Then we could leave the question of which bedroom till to-morrow."

"My dear Emily, don't be absurd. Of course Mrs. Crabbie won't like having to see for herself that you've discovered what a shockingly neglected state she has allowed the spare rooms to get into, but it's just as well to point it out to her on the spot. She can't find anything to say, I'm certain."

"Oh, I wasn't going to mention the dust."

"You ought to."

"There's hardly any. Look! The mantelpiece is quite clean."

"Oh, I dare say she dusted where it would show."

A slow step was heard approaching. Mrs. Crabbie knocked and followed Miss Todd's squeak of invitation to enter by a majestic appearance.

"Rose informed me that you wished to see me, ma'am."

"Yes. If you're sure it's quite convenient, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"It is not wholly convenient, ma'am, but if the dinner is in any way spoilt it will be because I was called away from my cooking."

"I—I won't keep you. It's just that I've invited Mrs. Lawley to stay here and she will arrive to-morrow in time for lunch."

"I'm extremely glad to hear it, ma'am."

"I hoped you'd be pleased. We've known her for so long, haven't we? And you were fond of the rector."

"That is so, ma'am. I'm sure I'll do my best, and so will the maids, to make Mrs. Lawley comfortable. Which room were you thinking of giving her?"

"I don't know. Miss Anderson and I were looking at them. She thinks the blue room would be best."

"Dearest Emily, I only said that I liked it myself."

"Oh, I thought—— Never mind. Which do you say, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"If I'd known a week ago that Mrs. Lawley was expected, ma'am, I'd have said the green bedroom, but as Miss Anderson's occupying that——"

"You put me there," Fanny interjected sweetly.

"I know I did, miss. It's the best spare bedroom."

"Would you like me to move, Emily? I could easily come in here, and your friend Mrs. Lawley can have my room."

"Oh, I don't think—— Wouldn't that mean a lot of trouble, Mrs. Crabbie?"

"It's for you to say, ma'am. They're your guests."

"Well—— I don't want to turn you out, Fanny, but I understood you to say you didn't like your present room——"

"And what, may I ask, miss, is wrong with it?" Mrs. Crabbie turned, overflowing with wrath, to Fanny Anderson.

"Nothing." Fanny smiled amiably. "I think Miss Todd misunderstood."

"Oh, Fanny, I didn't. You know you did say——"

"Dearest Emily, we're not talking about my room or my preferences. We're trying to decide which room Mrs. Lawley is to have. I say the blue one, but we haven't heard what Mrs. Crabbie thinks."

"I leave it to the mistress, miss."

"I'd rather you'd say, Mrs. Crabbie."

"Well, then, ma'am, is there anything against the rose room?"

"This? I like it. Don't you vote for it, Fanny?"

"If it was clean, Emily."

"Clean, miss?"

"I said clean, Mrs. Crabbie."

"And might I inquire, miss, what you meant by saying it?"

"I shouldn't have thought you needed to be told." Fanny shrugged her shoulders.

"The room's perfectly free from dust to me, miss."

"Is it? Look at Miss Todd's hands."

"May I see them, ma'am, as Miss Anderson seems to think there's dirt that should have been removed?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Mrs. Crabbie. When I rang for Rose there was a very little dust on the bell-handle, but nothing to speak of. I was just saying to Miss Anderson how spotless these rooms were, the whole house, in fact."

"So it ought to be, ma'am. Every stick of furniture was taken out of each room, and there wasn't an inch not gone over. I saw to it myself."

"Yes, I know."

"Then how do you account for dust on Miss Todd's hands after ringing the bell?" Fanny demanded.

Mrs. Crabbie cast her a withering glance.

"A little dust might easily settle on a thing like that, miss. I'm sorry if it did, ma'am, but to have the room called dirty——"

"Fanny, I'm sure you didn't mean that?"

"Of course I did. I don't intend to imply that it was filthy, but it's certainly not clean. That bell-pull is quite grey, and I see a spider's web in that corner."

"If there is one, miss, it's only because it's too high up to reach with a broom-handle."

"Not at all. You could get some steps."

Mrs. Crabbie turned to Miss Todd.

"If Miss Anderson has quite finished giving me directions about my work, ma'am, and done finding fault with me for neglecting it, I'd like to get back to my cooking. After what you said yesterday I'm anxious that there shouldn't be any reason for more complaints."

"Oh, yes. But I'm sure Miss Anderson didn't mean to find fault." Mrs. Crabbie sniffed. Fanny ignored both the sniff and Miss Todd's imploring glance.

"That's as may be, ma'am, only it sounded very like it. Am I to understand, then, that you wish Mrs. Lawley to have this room?"

"I—I think so. Don't you, Fanny?"

"It's entirely for you to say, dearest Emily."

"Then we'd better arrange it that way, Mrs. Crabbie. Will you tell the maids?"

"Yes, ma'am. They'll be as pleased as I am to see Mrs. Lawley again."

She's such an old friend of yours and the poor master was very fond of her."

"I know."

Mrs. Crabbie departed, leaving Miss Todd nearly in tears. Fanny, on the other hand, seemed very well pleased.

"Now, you see, Emily, I was right. A little firmness was all that was required."

"Oh, I'm not sure, Fanny. I'm afraid you've offended Mrs. Crabbie dreadfully."

"I?"

"Yes. By implying that this room hadn't been cleaned."

"It hasn't. Oughtn't you to wash your hands?"

"In a minute. I'm thankful, though, that she seemed quite glad about Mrs. Lawley coming."

"As if it was her place to say whether she was glad or not!"

"Yes, but you don't understand. Servants are getting scarce, and though we haven't had to make any changes for years I'd find it difficult if I had to look for new ones."

"It's all a question of money. As long as you pay ridiculously high wages you'll easily get plenty of service."

Miss Todd sighed. Fanny told her that she was tired and had better lie down before dinner. Miss Todd showed signs of rebellion.

"I don't want to. I had a rest after lunch and the result was I fell asleep and it made me late for tea and upset Taylor."

"Well, you needn't be afraid of that happening. I'll tap at your door when it's time to dress."

"No, thank you, Fanny. I'm going to my room, but I shan't lie down."

Miss Todd's tone was cold, decided. Fanny's glance flickered. Was the 'little firmness' she had recommended for Mrs. Crabbie all she needed in her own case? Miss Todd hoped that this might be so, but instead Fanny laughed, came over to her, took her arm, and playfully propelled her out of the room and into her own.

"Now, dearest Emily, I'm just going to tuck you up on this lovely soft sofa. I dare say you'll drop off, but don't be afraid. Dinner's at half-past seven, isn't it? It's only about a quarter-past six now. You've heaps of time for a nap."

"I don't want one."

"Yes, you do. You're tired out. I can see that. You said yourself that heat never suited you, and it's been a tiring day."

"Oh, it has," moaned Miss Todd.

Fanny referred to the enervating effects of the close weather. Miss Todd, with a shudder, recalled that interview in the library, Grier truculent, Fanny obstinate, the talk at the lodge with Mrs. Grier, the hot walk to and from the village, rendered additionally trying owing to the encounter between Fanny and Mrs. Karslake, the fatiguing task of going through her wardrobe with Fanny, admiring and acquisitive, as audience, unpleasantness with Taylor, Fanny's exploration of the bedrooms, her rudeness to Mrs. Crabbie. Oh, it had been a dreadful, dreadful day! No wonder that she felt so limp and deflated. If only she could hold out until next morning! Then Mrs. Lawley would be there, a third person, and Mrs. Lawley might be able to handle Fanny better than poor Miss Todd.

"Now, just take forty winks," advised Fanny brightly. During Miss Todd's chaotic reverie she had pulled down the blinds, plumped up the sofa cushions, placed a rug over Miss Todd's feet—"What pretty slippers, Emily. We take the same size in shoes, don't we? I've got very small feet too"—and laid a handkerchief, sprinkled with lavender water, on her temples. Miss Todd murmured gratitude she was very far from feeling

"What time shall I tell Mary you want her?" Fanny asked.

"Oh, I'll ring. Don't trouble to look for her, please, Fanny."

"I wasn't going to. What an idea! I intended to ring and when she came up to say she was to go to you— When, dearest Emily? Ten minutes to seven? Would that give you long enough to dress?"

"Oh, yes, quite. But I'd rather you let me ring, and I'll do it when I want Mary. It's no use dragging her upstairs just to say I'd like her in about half an hour's time."

"Oh, well, if you prefer keeping a dog and barking yourself——"

"It isn't exactly that, but the maids deserve some consideration."

"It seems to me they get nothing else from you."

Miss Todd's cheeks flushed.

"That isn't fair, Fanny. I like them to feel that they needn't listen for the bell all day."

"They take their time about coming when anybody rings. Before tea I rang for Mary, just to tell her about those few little alterations you had suggested she might make in the lovely things you gave me, dearest, and I assure you she took five minutes coming upstairs. I timed her. I had to ring twice before she condescended to appear."

"Taylor told me you rang for Mary. I—I wish you had let me arrange about her sewing for you."

"Oh, Emily, I'm so sorry if it was wrong of me to ask her myself. I understood that you had said I might."

Fanny looked so hurt and grieved, so entirely misconceived, that once again Miss Todd was the one in fault.

"I didn't mean that, Fanny. I know I did suggest that Mary might shorten a skirt and do one or two trifling things of that kind, but I'd rather have told her myself what you'd like done." Miss Todd's voice shook.

"Taylor said you asked Mary to undertake a good deal."

"And, pray, what business was it of Taylor's? I wasn't aware that she had been required to do anything herself. I'd be sorry to accept any favours from that sulky, disobliging creature."

"There's no question of that." Miss Todd began to tremble. Fanny sounded so fierce. "But Mary's only the housemaid, not like Timmins, though she's very clever with her needle. I don't know whether she could manage all those clothes will need doing to them."

"I'm quite willing to overlook their not being altered by a professional dressmaker, dearest Emily. And of course I can do a great deal myself."

"Yes, dear. You're wonderful. That velvet frock you wore last night——"

"What about it?"

"Why, you made it. You told me so when I admired it."

"Oh, yes. Yes, of course. And you gave me your beautiful amber to go with it."

"The beads just matched the colour. Oh, that reminds me, Fanny,

that you said a few minutes ago that we took the same size in shoes. Will you look in that drawer, the bottom one, and I think you'll find a box with a pair of bronze slippers in it. I've never worn them. The heels are a little high. If they fit you, please keep them.

"Oh, no, dearest Emily. You've given me so much already. I don't like to."

"You must, Fanny. I insist. Try them on, anyway. There! The fit's perfect. Are they comfortable?"

"Beautiful. So soft. And what pretty buckles!"

"Well, wear them and the amber with your frock. I think you have stockings to go with it, haven't you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I like you in brown."

"What is your favourite colour, Emily—when you're not in mourning?"

"Oh, something nondescript. I'm too pale for blue. Papa liked me in dark reds—wine or claret—or that very clear green, but I'm getting rather old for that."

"Indeed you're not. How ridiculous! But black suits you, and of course you can afford good materials and a good style. Cheap black's horrible. I remember when my father died—— Oh, but I'm not going to talk about it. Only being poor means that everything's so *squalid*. These are the first pair of really good slippers I've had for years. Thank you a thousand times, dearest Emily."

Fanny chattered on. Miss Todd wished that she would go away, but she had perched herself on the stool before the dressing-table and was fingering Miss Todd's possessions to a running commentary of admiration. She had said herself that she wanted Miss Todd to rest, yet there she sat, and it was manifestly impossible for Miss Todd to ask her to depart. The hands of the clock moved on until they indicated a quarter to seven. A discreet tap was heard at the door.

"Shall I see who it is?" Fanny suggested.

"It'll be Mary, I expect. Come in."

Mary appeared. She darted Fanny a look of palpable dislike and asked Miss Todd stiffly whether she were ready for her.

"Why, it's nearly ten minutes to seven," Fanny exclaimed. "And you haven't had your snooze, Emily. It was too bad of me to stay here, keeping you talking."

"I've been lying down."

"But that's not the same thing. Oh, well, we'd both better dress, I suppose. Aren't these slippers pretty, Mary? Kind Miss Todd's just given them to me."

"Yes, miss."

Miss Todd laughed nervously.

"Very kind, Fanny, when I couldn't wear them myself."

Fanny shook a playful finger at her and went out, carrying the slippers.

Miss Todd's head ached. She sat limply whilst Mary rearranged her hair after helping her to change into a plain black evening dress. Mary looked dour and disapproving. Of course she was annoyed that Fanny should have misinterpreted what Miss Todd said as to suggesting that the maid might undertake a few alterations, and undoubtedly Fanny had been rather officious, ringing for Mary and issuing orders, but she herself was to

blame for giving Fanny clothes that required remodelling. Faintly she wondered that Fanny had not better taste than to flaunt her perquisites before the servants. The amber beads were different. Anybody might accept a trifling gift like that. . . .

"Did Mrs. Crabbie tell you about Mrs. Lawley, Mary?" she inquired.

"Yes, ma'am."

"It will be nice to see her again, won't it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Let me see. She was here about a year ago, staying with the Ralstons, wasn't she?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"She came to tea several times, but of course I couldn't ask her to stay in the house with Papa so ill."

"No, ma'am."

Oh, dear! Miss Todd groaned to herself, how dreadful this is. I'm afraid Mary must be offended about something. I suppose it's Fanny. Had I better not say anything? I don't want to annoy Fanny, but on the other hand I can't have Mary so—so cross.

"Mary?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Is there—— Is there—— That is—— I'm afraid something's wrong."

"Well, ma'am——"

"Please tell me, Mary. I might be able to put it right."

Mary said grimly: "You can't do that, ma'am, as long as Miss Anderson is here."

"What—what has she done?"

"It's hard to explain, ma'am. I thought Taylor told you she rang for me and showed me a heap of sewing she said you wanted done for her."

"Oh, Mary, it wasn't exactly like that. I offered Miss Anderson a few things—clothes—that I couldn't wear whilst I was in mourning, and it seemed a pity to have them lying by so useless, and there were little alterations needed here and there I did say I'd get you to do, only I never meant her to expect you to undertake a great deal."

"If it's to oblige you, ma'am, I'd do a certain amount, but what Miss Anderson required would mean I'd not have much time for my own work, especially now that I'm taking Timmins' place and waiting on you."

"I thought—— Mrs. Crabbie and I agreed that it might be a good thing for you to look after me altogether, and get another housemaid."

"Indeed, ma'am?"

"Wouldn't you like it?"

"If we were by ourselves, ma'am, that is you and the staff as it was in the master's time, I'd be quite willing, I'm sure."

Mary did not sound enthusiastic or conciliatory. Miss Todd sighed.

"Will you think it over?"

"Yes, ma'am; but it would be waiting on you. I'd not undertake to do anything for Miss Anderson."

"She wouldn't expect it. I oughtn't to need a personal maid, only I got so accustomed to Timmins."

"It's quite different for you, ma'am, but Miss Anderson——" Mary sniffed. "Anybody can see with half an eye that she's never been accustomed to good service."

"I—I don't know," confessed Miss Todd humbly.

"Well, ma'am, she's vexed me very much—and Taylor, too—by her ringing bells and giving orders as though she owned the place and not you, and I never saw Mrs. Crabbie so put-about. Were you there, ma'am, when she as good as accused Mrs. Crabbie of not keeping the house clean?"

"There was a little dust on the bell-pull and—and a cobweb. I think Mrs. Crabbie misunderstood—— The house is beautifully clean and always has been."

Mary drove a final hairpin into Miss Todd's neat grey coils.

"I'll not forget my place, ma'am, but I've been here a good many years and you mustn't mind my saying that if Miss Anderson stays much longer and goes on like she's begun you'll have to part with all of us. Neither Taylor nor Rose nor me will stop to be spoken to the way she does, and bells rung as if the house was on fire, and this, that, and the other ordered the same as the Croft might be a hotel. It's a bit too much."

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Mary. She does rather—manage."

"And if we go you'll lose Mrs. Crabbie." Mary spoke with gloomy satisfaction. "Of course it's your own business, ma'am, but it seems a pity to let servants who've been here years and done their best be driven away by somebody you've only known a few weeks."

"I know, Mary."

"And she lost you Timmins, ma'am."

"Timmins gave me notice. She was to be married."

"So you thought, ma'am, but if she is it's a queer thing there hasn't been an announcement in the local paper, or a bit of wedding-cake, or as much as a line with her new address for any of us. We all liked Timmins. It isn't like her, and leaving you when you were ill, all alone in a strange hotel."

"I—I had Miss Anderson."

"She's got hold of you, ma'am, and doesn't mean to let you go. I know her sort."

"Mrs. Lawley being here may make things easier."

"I'm sure I hope it will, ma'am."

Mary departed, shaking her head. Alone, Miss Todd allowed herself the luxury of shedding a few tears before leaving her room and meeting Fanny for dinner. The clang from a heavy cow-bell announced it. Fanny, complete with amber beads and bronze slippers, drew Miss Todd's attention to the delightful difference between its note and the brazen summons of the gong.

"How you could have stood it for so long, dearest Emily! I believe Taylor enjoyed making as much row as she dared."

"I don't like the cow-bell," objected Miss Todd feebly.

"Well, what will you have? Is there a smaller bell?"

"I'm not sure. Taylor, do you know?"

"There's a little brass one in the library, ma'am, but you'd never hear that upstairs."

"Oh, then, the cow-bell will do for the present," Miss Todd decided wearily.

She could have flung it at Fanny and knew, as they went in to dinner together, that Taylor longed to do the same. . . .

Dinner was exactly as suggested and planned between Miss Todd and

Mrs. Crabbie seeming æons ago. Fanny had brought her usual excellent appetite to the board and rallied Miss Todd on her lack of any. How could she eat? Miss Todd wondered dismally. The threatened departures of Mary, Taylor, and Rose, followed almost certainly, as Mary had warned her, by that of Mrs. Crabbie, would leave her servantless, defenceless, at the entire mercy of Fanny. Fanny would seize the opportunity to remain, to insinuate herself into a position of responsibility, to assist Miss Todd to select new maids who would play into her hands, not their employer's, and possibly—Miss Todd's blood ran cold at the prospect—continue a permanent inmate of the Croft. She must never, never achieve this. Miss Todd's fevered brain toyed frenziedly with the idea of shutting the house, of telling Fanny determinedly that she was going away indefinitely, and would Fanny kindly make her own arrangements? The only difficulty in the way of accomplishing this was that Miss Todd could never bring herself to say any such thing.

The long evening alone in the drawing-room with Fanny after dinner was mercifully avoided by the appearance of the rector and his wife. Taylor announced them just as Miss Todd was wondering whether she could intimate to Fanny politely, yet with sufficient firmness for it to take effect, that she preferred to preside at her own coffee-table. Fanny was standing by the window, remarking affably that the morrow was certain to be fine as she could see the gnats and midges dancing, when the door opened.

"Mr. and Mrs. Waring, ma'am."

"Oh, yes. Do come in, Mrs. Waring. Good evening, Mr. Waring. How are you both? Will you bring some more cups, please, Taylor?"

"I hope we aren't disturbing you, my dear Miss Todd?"

"Not in the least. We've just finished dinner, Miss Anderson and I. Fanny, I want to introduce my clergyman and his wife. Mr. Waring—Miss Anderson. Miss Anderson—Mrs. Waring."

"Are you staying here?" Mrs. Waring asked. "How nice for Miss Todd!"

"It's nice for me." Fanny gave a shy little laugh. "Yes, we met when Emily was away and came back together."

"And what do you think of Little Batnors?" demanded Mr. Waring earnestly.

"Oh, I like it immensely. I'm longing to see your church. Emily showed me the outside as we drove up from the station. She tells me that you have a lovely old font and parts of the interior are pre-Norman."

The Reverend Hubert Waring, who was an enthusiastic archæologist, sat down with gusto to his favourite theme. Miss Todd, embarking on a conversation with Mrs. Waring mainly embracing weather, parish activities, housekeeping, and similar safe topics, could not avoid seeing that Fanny was making a very good impression. Alert, attentive, she allowed Mr. Waring to talk, drawing him out by just the right question or interjection at the precise time when it was most acceptable or required. How much Fanny seemed to know, reflected Miss Todd wistfully, in spite of her ignorance about the individual who sat on the stile. Of course, as a clergyman's daughter she would be well acquainted with churches, inside and out. It was a pity that she was so reticent about her father as Miss Todd could not mention him when Fanny had so earnestly requested her not to, but the Warings would have been interested.

"I'm so glad you didn't return alone," Mrs. Waring was saying. "We both felt for you so much, coming back to an empty house the first time after your loss. I thought of writing a little note or sending some flowers, but was afraid it would be coals to Newcastle."

Mrs. Waring laughed. Miss Todd said gratefully: "That was very sweet of you. Of course I found it rather trying, but Fanny being with me——"

Fanny called gaily across to Miss Todd: "What's this about 'Fanny', dearest Emily?"

"Only that I was just beginning to tell Mrs. Waring, dear, what a help it was having you with me when I came home. I had so dreaded it."

"Poor Emily! I know."

"Miss Anderson has lost her father, so she understands how I feel." Miss Todd talked on, uneasily conscious that Fanny, whilst apparently deep in a discussion about mediæval abbeys with Mr. Waring, was managing to hear everything Miss Todd said to the rector's wife.

"Yes. So nice for you to have someone to keep you company. You must bring Miss Anderson to tea."

"That would be delightful."

"Shall we settle a day now? Are you fairly free? I suppose"—Mrs. Waring's tone was doubtful—"you are not going out very much at present, being in mourning?"

"No. Miss Anderson and I have planned a few little excursions like an afternoon in Market Batnors, but nothing social. I'm afraid it's dull for her."

"Emily, what nonsense!" Fanny tossed the reproach at Miss Todd with a laugh.

"Well, which day, then?"

"May I leave it and ring you up?" Miss Todd coloured. "As a matter of fact I'm expecting another visitor to-morrow, and whilst she is here I shall be rather occupied."

"Of course. But won't Miss Anderson come?"

"Thank you. Will you ask her? Fanny, Mrs. Waring wants you to go to tea at the rectory."

"How very kind!" Fanny broke off her conversation with the rector to smile at his wife. "I'd love it, only—— Are you not coming, dearest Emily? Oh, I know that with your mourning you aren't making many engagements, but such old friends—— I expect you've known Emily a long time, haven't you, Mrs. Waring?"

"Since my husband has been the rector."

"Oh, then—— I'd enjoy it so much more if she was with me."

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to go, Fanny, as Mrs. Lawley is to be here." As Miss Todd had dismally foreboded Mrs. Waring's face stiffened and her husband coughed.

"Mrs. Lawley?" Mrs. Waring repeated. "Is she coming to stay with you, Miss Todd?"

"Yes."

Miss Todd felt physically incapable of saying more. A diversion was created by the arrival of Taylor with the extra coffee-cups, but she caught Fanny's gaze, bright, avidly curious, and wondered how she was to explain. . . .

"I love Mrs. Crabbie's coffee," Mrs. Waring confessed. "What a treasure she is! I'm sure I envy you sometimes. Jane and Ethel are so stupid, and directly I've got a maid into my ways she says Little Batnors is dull and off she goes to a town. Don't you think Miss Todd's very fortunate in her servants, Miss Anderson?"

Everybody waited for Fanny's polite acquiescence, but to Miss Todd's dismay her reply was entirely unexpected.

"I'm not sure that I altogether agree, Mrs. Waring. Her maids are very good in a great many ways, but poor Emily's completely under their thumb. I'm always telling her to assert herself, only it's no use."

"You take sugar, don't you, Mr. Waring?"

"Thank you, Miss Todd. One lump, please."

"It depends on what you mean by asserting herself," Mrs. Waring told Fanny.

"Well, I think she ought to have meals at hours that suit her."

"Er—— Doesn't she?"

"No. The servants expect her to be ready to the minute, and just because she fell asleep this afternoon, tired out by the heat, and was a little late for tea, Taylor made herself most disagreeable."

"Oh, Fanny, that's an exaggeration, I'm certain."

"No, dearest. I saw how upset you were by her manner. And last night, Mrs. Waring, the dinner was quite spoiled—at least Emily thought so. I didn't notice anything wrong—all because she wasn't down exactly at half-past seven."

Fanny nodded with aggressive triumph. The Waring's looked uncomfortable. Mrs. Waring began to murmur about Mr. Todd's long illness. With an invalid and nurses in the house the servants had to keep to certain times. "You can alter it all gradually, can't you?" she suggested.

"I don't want to. I think punctuality is a very good thing." Miss Todd laughed weakly.

"Punctuality—yes, dear, but not being in thrall to one's servants about it," Fanny rejoined.

"Well, this doesn't get us any forrader with which day Miss Anderson's coming to tea." Mrs. Waring looked rather uncertainly from Fanny to her hostess.

"What about to-morrow? Would that suit you, Mrs. Waring?"

"Perfectly. Choir practice isn't till six, so Hubert will be able to show her the church."

"To-morrow then, Fanny?"

"It's extremely kind of Mrs. Waring, Emily, but what about Mrs. Lawley?"

"She'll be tired with the journey. I'll keep her company." Miss Todd spoke hastily.

"Oh! But wouldn't it be nicer to wait a day or two until she's rested and then we three can come? Going out to tea at the rectory isn't like Emily doing anything unsuitable whilst she's in mourning."

Fanny gazed blandly at Mrs. Waring and then smiled at Miss Todd.

"I think——"

"You'd better come by yourself, Miss Anderson. We're no novelty to Miss Todd."

"I hope you'll ask me again later on, Mrs. Waring, after—after Mrs.

Lawley's visit." Miss Todd's words came nervously and hurriedly. She had longed to say 'after Miss Anderson has gone', but dreaded Fanny's wrath, immediate or postponed. Quite obviously Fanny had no intention of going.

"Of course. Then shall we call that settled? Four o'clock, Miss Anderson. I'm afraid we're not as punctual as Miss Todd, so don't hurry walking down if it's very hot."

With a few more aimless civilities the Warings took their departure. After seeing them out and promising Mrs. Waring some roses, Miss Todd returned to the drawing-room. Fanny was frowning and nibbling a wheaten biscuit.

"Well, Fanny, what did you think of my parson and his wife?" Miss Todd asked.

"Quite pleasant people, dear."

"I'm so glad they've asked you there to-morrow. It'll be a little change from me."

"Oh, Emily, you talk as though I were tired of your company! What an idea! And I don't particularly want to go by myself to a strange house. Why couldn't you have put it off until Mrs. Lawley could come with us?"

"Because—— Oh, well, it's a little awkward about her and the Warings."

"Do tell me. Has there been a quarrel?"

"N-no, not exactly a quarrel, but as a clergyman's daughter, Fanny, you'll know that no rector's widow cares for her husband's successor."

"I see. And Mrs. Lawley doesn't endorse the Warings?"

"Something like that. After Mr. Lawley died of course she had to leave the rectory and I believe there was a little unpleasantness. Something about the stair-carpets, I think it was. Mrs. Lawley said they were her property and the Warings insisted that they belonged to the house. Anyway, it was all very disagreeable, and Sybil Karlake——"

"I suppose she interfered?"

"She was mixed up in it. I didn't have anything to do with it, luckily, but Mrs. Lawley stayed on for a time in Little Batnors—after she was a widow, I mean—and she used to criticize the services and the way Mr. Waring managed certain affairs in the parish, and it was not nice for the Warings."

"No wonder you don't wish to take her to tea with them."

"I'm sure she wouldn't go, but I could hardly tell Mrs. Waring that. Mrs. Lawley said to me once that she was never going to set foot in the rectory again."

"Of course if she's badly off she'd want to get anything she could from it, including the stair-carpets."

"But she isn't badly off. Her father was the Bishop of Clactonbury Rings, and he married a very wealthy woman. Mrs. Lawley is quite rich, I believe."

"Are the Warings?"

"I don't know. I imagine not. The stipend's rather small, and I never heard that either of them had private means."

"Then it was horrid of Mrs. Lawley to make a fuss about some old stair-carpets."

Miss Todd protested nervously. How did Fanny always manage to give such a diabolical twist to everything she said?

"I didn't mean that she did. It—it was a matter of principle. I suppose if her husband had paid for the stair-carpet she didn't see why the Warings should have them when she had to give up the rectory."

"It would have been more gracious of her to leave them there and say nothing about it."

Once again Fanny was right, or thought herself right. In the long run (thirty years had been a very long run) Fanny always was. . . .

"You will go to tea, won't you?" pleaded Miss Todd.

"If you wish, dearest Emily. You seemed to want me to go, so I couldn't very well get out of it."

"I don't see what else I could have said. We hadn't made any other engagement."

"But Mrs. Lawley's coming."

"As I said, I'll look after her."

"That looks as though you wished me to be out of the way."

"Fanny, what utter nonsense!"

"I thought it sounded like it."

"It was nothing of the kind. I've just explained that Mrs. Lawley doesn't care for the Warings and wouldn't go to tea there, and in any case she will be feeling the effects of the journey and like to take things quietly."

"Well, I wish you hadn't run me in for it. I didn't take any fancy to either, and a whole afternoon there——"

"I thought you and Mr. Waring seemed to get on so well together."

"He was talking about his church. I found it most uninteresting."

Miss Todd sighed. Really, all this was very difficult. She had hoped that tea at the vicarage would dispose of Fanny and she herself could have a talk with her old friend and obtain her advice. Oh, not altogether concerning Fanny, of course. Miss Todd might touch lightly on the topic of her other guest, but what she chiefly yearned to consult Mrs. Lawley about was Timmins and the sundry domestic upheavals which had threatened since Miss Todd's return. Since her return *with Fanny*. That made all the difference. She had spoken sincerely when she told Mrs. Waring that their arrival together had distracted her mind from the first renewed realization of her loss, but if she had come back, as intended and anticipated all along, with Timmins instead of Fanny Anderson—— Then life would have resumed its old even measure, former friendships continuing, the daily round as it was before. Fanny had disorganized, disrupted, and damaged the domestic machinery, made Miss Todd nervous, apprehensive, even more unsure of herself than she had been all along, and was by no means at the end of her activities in these directions. How would it all eventuate?

"You needn't stay long," she murmured.

"I don't intend to."

Fanny sounded very determined. Miss Todd quailed.

"What about Mrs. Lawley?" Fanny asked. "You said she'd arrive in time for lunch."

"Yes. The train gets to Stapleby at ten minutes past twelve. You remember we changed there? She can get a local at twelve-twenty, and it's only about a quarter of an hour's run."

"You'll meet her at the station here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you for reminding me. I must send a message to tell Smithson to have the pony-trap ready at half-past twelve."

"Emily dearest, do you think it's wise?"

"Is what wise?"

"To drive down just at the hottest time of the day and wait about on the platform. Those local trains are often late."

"It doesn't matter. I can sit in Mr. Stubbs' office. It's always cool there and I like a chat."

"Well, if you knock yourself up don't blame me."

"A little drive like that won't hurt me."

Fanny frowned and dissented.

"Can't you send the trap for Mrs. Lawley and the luggage?"

"Oh, Fanny, that wouldn't be either kind or polite. She's oid, and old people like a little attention. I'm sure she'd be dreadfully hurt if she found nobody at the station and had to come up to the house all by herself. I'm not sure, now I think of it, that it wouldn't be better for me to go to Stapleby and meet her there and come on here with her."

"Emily! I never heard anything so preposterous. You'd have to start soon after breakfast to get these dreadful local connections, and you'd probably arrive at Stapleby at least an hour before Mrs. Lawley's train got in, and you would be a perfect wreck for the rest of the day. I won't hear of it."

Fanny looked like an angry little game-cock. For a second Miss Todd dallied with the temptation to tell her that it was no business of hers, but before she could nerve herself to utter the words Fanny clapped her hands.

"I know, dearest Emily. I'll go to Stapleby and meet Mrs. Lawley, and all you have to do is to be ready to welcome her here. Now, isn't that a good idea?"

Miss Todd sat appalled. Until Fanny's brazen suggestion—yes, it was brazen—she did not realize how much she had counted on having her friend to herself for a little while before the inevitable introduction to Fanny. She had no intention of complaining about Fanny, but she could consult Mrs. Lawley about her in a way which would have been impossible with either Mr. Massey or Mrs. Karslake. Now, instead, she saw Fanny taking possession of Mrs. Lawley much in the manner that she had taken possession of Miss Todd at Derriford, insinuating herself into Mrs. Lawley's confidence, giving Mrs. Lawley her version of the Timmins business and the Grier episode, and, worst of all, talking over Miss Todd herself. Mrs. Lawley was certain to be told that Miss Todd suffered from her heart, that Fanny and Mrs. Lawley between them must try to spare, safeguard, and shelter dearest Emily. Possibly Mrs. Lawley, although far more level-headed and experienced than Miss Todd, would succumb to Fanny's wiles precisely as Miss Todd had done. Her dismay forced her into protest.

"Oh, no, Fanny. I don't think Mrs. Lawley would like it at all. To be met by a stranger——"

"I should explain everything. I'm sure she'd understand."

"I much prefer to meet her myself."

"Well, if you'll only go to the station I might agree, but if you send the pony-cart all the way to Stapleby it'll mean your walking down just when it's so hot."

"I wasn't going to send the pony-cart all the way to Stapleby. It's quite an easy change there. There'd be no need for you to go so far, Fanny. It was only that Mrs. Lawley will naturally expect someone to be on the platform here."

"Then can't I be the someone, dearest Emily?"

Miss Todd hesitated, nonplussed. She did not want to hurt Fanny's feelings, although she suspected these to be composed of tolerably durable material, yet how difficult it was to convey to her, politely, but with sufficient firmness, that her company was not desired. This was another of the occasions when Fanny could show herself amazingly obtuse. To suggest so calmly taking Miss Todd's place on the plea of saving her fatigue—What was her motive? Reluctantly Miss Todd was learning that Fanny did little or nothing without a motive.

"I would much sooner go myself, Fanny."

"Then hadn't I better come too?"

"No, thank you." Miss Todd endeavoured to soften her refusal by adding: "There's really not room in the pony-cart for more than two people, and Mrs. Lawley's old-fashioned. She likes to bring plenty of luggage."

"Is she staying long?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't mention any date."

"When did you write to invite her?"

Miss Todd gasped.

"Because I wrote for you—don't you remember?—and there was nothing in the letter about Mrs. Lawley paying you a visit."

"I know there wasn't."

Fanny waited. Miss Todd felt trapped, helpless.

"Was that wire Mrs. Karslake sent off to ask Mrs. Lawley to come?"

With immense courage Miss Todd answered that the telegram had been a private matter. "Please don't ask me so many questions, Fanny. Mrs. Lawley is coming, and I intend to meet her."

"Well, I think it's very foolish of you." Fanny looked sulky. "You'll only knock yourself up."

"No, I shan't, and if I do I'm sure you'll look after me again."

Miss Todd smiled pleadingly. Inwardly her spirit quailed at the prospect of a second illness and another convalescence under the auspices of Fanny, but she had to placate her by a tactful reminder of how kind Fanny had been the first time. Fanny smiled back.

"Dearest Emily, you know I'd be only too willing to, though I'm afraid Mrs. Crabbie and the rest would all do their best to exclude me."

"Oh, no. And as I'm not going to be laid up, I hope, we needn't worry about it."

Pleasant relations were apparently restored, but Miss Todd had an uneasy suspicion that Fanny was not satisfied with the arrangement that her hostess should meet Mrs. Lawley.

Fate favoured Fanny. Next morning Miss Todd woke with a bad headache. She was subject to headaches in varying degrees of severity. Some were merely tiresome, others so acute as to harass her considerably, and the worst form of all laid her low altogether. It was the middle variety which threatened now, she realized dismally. Had she been by herself she would have remained in bed, but with Fanny in the house and Mrs. Lawley expected she dared not. Mary exclaimed at her appearance when she brought Miss Todd her tea.

"I know, Mary. I'm afraid I'm getting one of my headaches."

"Oh, ma'am!"

"Yes. Isn't it a nuisance?"

"Why not stay there, ma'am? Mrs. Crabbie will arrange about meals, and the rest of us will do everything to see that Mrs. Lawley's comfortable."

"It's very good of you, but I—I think I'd better get up. If I take things quietly it may pass off."

Mary said bluntly: "If you're afraid of Miss Anderson bothering you, ma'am, I'll undertake to keep her out."

"Oh, Mary! I'm sure she wouldn't come in if she thought I'd rather not be disturbed."

"Wouldn't she?" Mary tossed her head contemptuously.

"I think I'll get up. If I feel I can't manage it I can always go back to bed."

"Will you ring then, ma'am, when you're ready, and I'll come and help you to dress?"

"Yes, thank you."

In many respects Mary was proving an admirable substitute for Timmins. If only Fanny would not interfere and drive her into giving notice! How pleasant, how peaceful life would be were Fanny safely back in Derriford or departed elsewhere, and Miss Todd and Mrs. Lawley alone together! The reflection reminded her of the temporarily shelved problem of Mrs. Lawley's arrival. Sipping her tea, trying to overcome by sheer force of will that insistent throbbing behind her temples, Miss Todd winced from the prospect of driving down in the heat and glare, waiting on the unshaded platform for the dilatory train, or sitting, sick and giddy in Mr. Stubbs' stuffy little office. How could she collect her wits sufficiently to warn Mrs. Lawley about Fanny? This, she knew, was her moving motive in securing a brief space of time alone with Mrs. Lawley. Perhaps if the day did not turn out very hot her head might improve. Most tiresome it should happen this morning of all others that she started a headache! Was it caused by worry, anxiety, nervous strain, or undue indulgence in port? She did not want to tell Fanny that she had a headache, but after dressing, with liberal assistance from Mary, and tottering downstairs, the fact was evident. . . .

"Good morning, Fanny."

"Good morning, dearest Emily. Why, what's wrong?"

"Only a little headache."

"Only a little headache!" Fanny echoed Miss Todd's faintly-uttered admission with thorough-going contempt for the inadequacy of the description.

"Yes. I—I get them now and again. It isn't a very bad one. I'll just take things quietly this morning, and it may pass off in time for me to go and meet Mrs. Lawley."

To Miss Todd's surprise Fanny did not answer by an eager offer to take her dearest Emily's place. She said cheerfully:

"Oh, we needn't bother about that for hours. Try to eat some breakfast, and afterwards I'll find you a shady spot in the garden."

"The house is really cooler."

"Well, just as you like."

Miss Todd sipped coffee and crumbled toast. Fanny ate scrambled eggs, a grilled herring, bread and marmalade, and finished with grape-fruit. At the conclusion of the meal she escorted Miss Todd solicitously to the morning-room, drew down the blinds, and established her hostess on the sofa. Miss Todd's eyes closed. Fanny was really very kind. As Fanny tiptoed from the room she recalled her.

"Shall you be all right, Fanny? Can you amuse yourself?"

"Oh, yes, dearest. Don't worry about me. Try to go to sleep."

Miss Todd obeyed. The throbbing in her head lessened and she dozed. It might have been a dream, but she wondered whether she heard voices, raised and heated, in some argument or dispute. Everything was perfectly quiet otherwise. No doubt she had fallen asleep and imagined this. What was the time? She raised herself and consulted her wrist-watch. Fanny had admired it. Miss Todd might get her one the same.

The watch indicated twenty minutes to eleven. At a quarter to eleven precisely Taylor walked in. She carried a little tray with a decanter and two wine-glasses. Hard on her heels came Fanny. She inquired gently how Miss Todd felt.

"Oh, I think I'm better, dear, thank you. I had quite a nice nap. You're letting me get into terribly lazy ways, I'm afraid, Fanny."

"There was nothing for you to do, and a sleep's the best cure for a headache. Now, are you ready for your port, dearest Emily?"

"Oh, must I have that? I don't feel that I want it, you know."

"You ate hardly any breakfast, and you need something. Doesn't she, Taylor?"

"It's for you to say, miss."

To Miss Todd's alarmed ears Taylor's reply sounded deliberately insolent, but Fanny ignored it smilingly.

"I'll pour out your glass. There! Now I'll have mine, though it's nothing but greed after my big breakfast."

"Nonsense! When we've finished I really must get up. There are quite a lot of little jobs to do. I want to put some flowers in Mrs. Lawley's room, and just have a word with Mrs. Crabbie about the meals."

"Oh, I've done all that, dearest Emily."

Miss Todd sat clasping the stem of her untouched wine-glass.

"You've—what?" she gasped.

"I interviewed Mrs. Crabbie and went through to-day's menus with her. It's all nicely arranged, and you've nothing to worry about."

"But—but Mrs. Crabbie—— Oh, Fanny! I hope you didn't—— She likes things her own way."

"So I gathered."

"I wondered if I heard voices, and then I thought I must have been dreaming. You and she weren't—— Oh, you haven't had any unpleasantness, have you, Fanny?"

"If we have, it was entirely on Mrs. Crabbie's part. Do drink your port, Emily."

"Presently. Oh, what happened?"

"Mrs. Crabbie was very insolent, and only that I absolutely forbade it she would have forced her way in here, disturbed you, and made herself extremely disagreeable."

"I wish you'd let her come in."

"And startle you and wake you up and make your head worse? Certainly not. I told her that if she wanted to speak to you she could wait till she was sent for."

"Oh, Fanny!"

"Well, dearest Emily, firmness is the only way of dealing with a woman like that."

"I know, but—— There was no necessity for you to go down to the kitchen."

"I didn't. I rang and told Rose to send Mrs. Crabbie to me in the drawing-room."

"And—and what happened?"

"I explained that you were lying down and I hoped the rest would do your head good. I said I didn't want you to be bothered about anything, but with Mrs. Lawley coming there were certain matters that I knew you'd like arranged, and I suggested going through the meals with Mrs. Crabbie."

"And—and what did she say?"

"Do finish your port."

"I don't want it. Please go on."

"There's nothing to tell you. I said I'd written out a list of menus and thought I'd better see what was in the house. Emily, Mrs. Crabbie's most unsuitable as a housekeeper, so extravagant and muddle-headed. Her store-room's a disgrace."

"Did you look into it?"

"Yes, I did, and I told her pretty plainly what I thought of her methods. Nothing labelled, far too much ordered in at once, things uncovered or left to go bad, and if I'd had time to investigate more thoroughly I'm certain I'd find that she was making a nice penny out of the housekeeping—just like Grier and the garden."

"Please, Fanny! That was all cleared up. Oh, dear, dear! I'm afraid Mrs. Crabbie will be terribly upset and offended. I don't want to find fault with my guest, Fanny, but it was a little interfering of you, wasn't it, to arrange the meals and go into the store-room and not let Mrs. Crabbie speak to me?"

"I'm sorry, Emily, but my sole wish was to save you trouble."

"There wouldn't have been any. Mrs. Crabbie is quite capable of seeing to everything."

"To suit herself, I dare say."

Miss Todd sat shuddering. Her head, temporarily better, was beginning to throb again. Fanny seemed to loom over her menacingly. If she attempted to go to the station she felt certain that she would die on the way, and how was Mrs. Crabbie to be appeased and induced to remain? Directly Miss Todd saw her she would inevitably give notice. How could Fanny have been so tactless, so ill-bred as to issue orders to Mrs. Crabbie without any authorization from Miss Todd?

"I wish you hadn't," she moaned.

"I think it's a very good thing I did. I hope you'll bestir yourself, Emily, and look into the household management better. You ought to be grateful to me for opening your eyes to the way Mrs. Crabbie's exploiting you behind your back."

"You thought that of Grier, and he proved that it was all a—a mistake on your part."

"I wasn't satisfied, although you pretended that you were. And with Mrs. Crabbie there can't be any mistake. Why, I asked to see her weekly accounts and she had the assurance to tell me that she never kept any."

"Why should she? Mr. Massey's quite satisfied with the expenditure every month."

"Then he oughtn't to be, or you either. But we needn't bother with

that now. I think Mrs. Crabbie saw that I meant what I said, and she won't dare to play you any trick about meals—like that dinner, you know."

Mechanically Miss Todd drank her port. Its taste resembled rusty ink. Was Fanny right and did Mrs. Crabbie defraud her employer behind her back? Angrily Miss Todd told herself that it didn't matter whether Mrs. Crabbie did. Would she leave? How awkward, how inconvenient, just when Mrs. Lawley was coming!

"I think I'd better see Mrs. Crabbie," she murmured uncertainly.

"Now, Emily, I beg that you won't. It will only upset you. She was very rude to me, but I don't wish to say too much about that."

"I must explain. I can't have her thinking that I—I authorized you to go downstairs and—and give orders."

"She knows perfectly well that I acted as I did solely to spare you."

"Yes, yes, of course; but it's all rather unfortunate."

"It need be nothing of the kind, if only you'll be sensible."

"Sensible?"

"Yes. Anybody else would insist on Mrs. Crabbie apologizing to me, but if you will promise not to let her ride rough-shod over you and try to introduce a little more firmness into your dealings with her, I'm willing to overlook the way she addressed me."

Fanny sounded magnanimous, condescending, and, as she always was, in the right. Again Miss Todd's dazed brain wondered how she managed it. She had been at fault, aggressive, interfering, egregiously tactless, and Mrs. Crabbie was surely entitled to resent such behaviour on the part of one who, after all, was merely a guest in the house, but Fanny had succeeded in making the housekeeper out to be the one to blame, with Miss Todd as a minor offender. Ruefully Miss Todd gazed at Fanny. What could she do?

"I'd rather hear what Mrs. Crabbie has to say," she objected.

"Oh, well, of course, Emily, if you are going to accept her version and prefer it to mine, that's all about it."

"It's only fair to both of you, Fanny. You know, dear"—Miss Todd hesitated and then plunged on desperately—"you were rather—rather mistaken about Grier, and—and it may be the same here."

"I don't very well see how there can be any mistake about slovenly mismanagement of her household duties, combined with insulting abuse of your guest."

"I'm sure Mrs. Crabbie wasn't insulting or abusive, Fanny. Naturally she did not like anybody strange coming into her domain and——"

"Poking her nose everywhere? Thank you."

"Oh, Fanny, I never meant that you did that."

"You implied it."

"Well, I didn't intend to. I must say all these years I've never found Mrs. Crabbie anything but thoroughly capable. That dinner the other night was the first thing I've ever had to complain about."

"Of course she's capable when you give her a perfectly free hand and don't make any investigations into her methods."

"Why should I? She knows her job. It's no business of mine."

"That's just it. You ought to make it your business."

Miss Todd sighed. For so long now—all her life, in fact—the household machinery had revolved on smooth, well-oiled wheels. There was plenty of money. She knew nothing of housekeeping. That was Mrs. Crabbie's

business. Why should she interfere, particularly at this belated hour? It was entirely Fanny's fault. Fanny had been intrusive, inquisitive, and no doubt if Mrs. Crabbie had expressed her displeasure somewhat forcibly she was perfectly justified in doing so.

"I'm quite satisfied with Mrs. Crabbie. I wish you hadn't upset her," Miss Todd lamented. "It'll be so awkward just when Mrs. Lawley is coming."

"That reminds me"—Fanny relegated Mrs. Crabbie temporarily to the limbo of the utterly unimportant—"which of us is going to meet her?"

"I am. I'll order the trap now."

"I think you're very foolish."

"I'm quite aware of that, Fanny."

Trembling at her own boldness Miss Todd rose from the sofa and rang the bell. When Taylor appeared she asked her to tell Smithson to bring the pony-cart round at twelve-thirty to drive to the station to meet Mrs. Lawley's train.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'll run up and put on my hat now. Shall we go into the garden, Fanny, until it's time for me to start?"

"If you like, dearest Emily, but don't you think it would be wiser to rest until the last possible second—if you're determined to go?"

"Of course I'm going. Well, as you don't care about the garden I have one or two things to do, so I'll just leave you to amuse yourself until Mrs. Lawley and I arrive."

Fanny nodded, answered that she would be perfectly happy, and Miss Todd left the room. On the threshold she was confronted by Mrs. Crabbie, a Mrs. Crabbie with so awful a mien of insulted dignity, outraged majesty, and implacable wrath that Miss Todd's knees knocked together at the sight.

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie!"

"Might I speak to you for a moment, ma'am, if convenient?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it isn't very. I was just going to get ready to drive down and meet Mrs. Lawley."

"I won't detain you, ma'am. What I have to say will only take a minute." A pause ensued, during which Miss Todd's heart thumped, her vision blurred, and her internal mechanism seemed to be turning slowly upside down. "I wish to give you a month's notice."

"Oh, Mrs. Crabbie! Why?"

"I've no doubt, ma'am, you will have had Miss Anderson's version, but I should prefer you to have mine. I don't want you to think I'm resigning a post where I was under the impression that I had always given satisfaction to my employers, my late master and yourself, Miss Emily, and been happy and contented personally for a mere whim. There's been a good deal more than that to oblige me to leave."

"Come into the drawing-room, please," faltered Miss Todd. "Don't hurry, Mrs. Crabbie. Tell me everything and take your time."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Mrs. Crabbie followed Miss Todd.

"I'm afraid Miss Anderson's been rather—rather indiscreet," the latter whispered. "Oh, Mrs. Crabbie, I hope you don't think I suggested that she should give orders and go into the store-room and—and arrange meals? I was lying down. My head was very bad. She—she did it quite of her own accord."

"So I supposed, ma'am, and all I can say is that it wasn't a thing any lady would have done." Mrs. Crabbie's wrath mounted. "The questions she asked me! How much of this was ordered in at a time, how much of that was used, what did I pay for the other thing. She as good as hinted that I made a regular purse out of the housekeeping, a meanness I'd never stoop to, and asking about accounts and monthly orders to the different shops, and telling me I was wasteful and extravagant and took advantage of your inexperience, ma'am."

"I'm dreadfully sorry," Miss Todd interjected the words faintly as Mrs. Crabbie paused for breath.

"So am I, ma'am, but it's final. I'll stop my month because I don't want to put you about, especially with Mrs. Lawley's visit, only not an hour longer."

"I—I don't know what to say. If I tell Miss Anderson that she mustn't interfere in this way again, will you overlook it and stay with me?"

"No, ma'am. My feelings are too much hurt, and in any case Miss Anderson would go on meddling. It's no use your saying a word to her. A born mischief-maker and for ever poking and prying and listening at doors."

"Oh, she—she doesn't!"

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, she does. I've seen her myself. As I'm leaving I'll be bold enough to say that if you don't get rid of her you'll regret it. She's lost you Timmins and now me, and do you suppose Taylor and Mary and Rose will stop? Not likely!"

"I hoped—— I thought when Mrs. Lawley came that she might go."

"Not she, ma'am. She knows when she's well off. I couldn't stay, not after the things she said to me."

"I didn't say them."

"No, ma'am; but there's been too much unpleasantness for matters ever to be the same again here."

"I know—I know. Oh, Mrs. Crabbie, I thought you'd promised Papa to stop with me."

"That was before either of us set eyes on Miss Anderson, ma'am, and the circumstances were very different. I'm sure my dear master wouldn't have wished me to be insulted and suspected and cross-questioned and ordered about by a hanger-on like her."

"Miss Anderson is my guest." Feebly Miss Todd attempted a lame defence of Fanny.

"And a nice snake in the grass you'll find her, ma'am. Look at the way you're standing up for her now instead of expecting her to beg my pardon for the things she came out with. I wonder what Mr. Massey will say when he hears about it. Downright taking away my character and that's actionable."

Mrs. Crabbie was plainly very angry. Wearily Miss Todd marshalled her scattered wits and intimated that the interview had better cease. "You will stay your month, Mrs. Crabbie, and perhaps before it's over you'll think differently."

"I'm afraid not, ma'am. And now, about meals. Could you come down to the kitchen and see whether you approve of what I was proposing to give you?"

"Isn't it all settled?"

"It is not, ma'am. Miss Anderson told me what she considered would be suitable, but that's very far from saying I'm going to carry out her orders. I'd be obliged if you'd give yours."

"But I never do. I mean, I'm always satisfied to leave it entirely to you."

"It would be more satisfactory if you came down, ma'am, and we went through the meals together."

"Is there time?"

"It won't take long, ma'am."

Miss Todd accompanied Mrs. Crabbie to the kitchen. The consultation over the menus was a polite farce, but it soothed Mrs. Crabbie's ruffled feelings and repaired the more glaring of the rents in Miss Todd's dignity. How clever of Mrs. Crabbie, she murmured, to remember that Mrs. Lawley liked that particular sauce. No, she did not in the least mind having salmon again. Perhaps they had better take advantage of it while it was obtainable. The two parted on their usual amiable footing, but Mrs. Crabbie, again timidly appealed to, declined to reconsider her decision to leave.

On going out of the kitchen Miss Todd glanced at her watch. Twenty-five minutes past twelve. Smithson was invariably meticulously punctual. She did not want to keep him waiting. Disregarding Fanny's anxious injunctions never to run upstairs Miss Todd hastened to her room, equipped herself with hat and gloves, and ran down again. The sunny gravel sweep below the front door was empty of any vehicle. Miss Todd waited and waited. Finally she accosted Taylor, who was coming out of the dining-room.

"Taylor, I think you'd better ring up the stables and tell Smithson I'm ready. It's funny he's never come."

"But he has, ma'am." Taylor looked surprised and slightly puzzled.

"The trap came to the minute."

"Then where is it? He isn't waiting at the lodge, is he?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. Miss Anderson went off in it as soon as it arrived."

"Miss Anderson?"

"Yes, ma'am. She said she was going to meet Mrs. Lawley instead of you. You were downstairs with Mrs. Crabbie and Miss Anderson said not to disturb you, so I thought you'd arranged for her to go."

"Oh, yes. Of—of course, Taylor. My head was so bad earlier that Miss Anderson thought it might be wiser if I didn't risk making it worse driving down and waiting on the platform."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I think I'll just go up and see whether everything's ready in Mrs. Lawley's room. What about flowers?"

"Grier said Miss Anderson told him to send up some sweet peas, ma'am."

Fanny was depriving her of doing any little service for her old friend, Miss Todd reflected wearily. First of all she had ordered the flowers for Mrs. Lawley's bedroom, and then she had deliberately circumvented Miss Todd's intention of meeting her guest. "I'd better arrange them," Miss Todd told Taylor.

"Miss Anderson did that, ma'am."

"Oh! Where?"

"In the pantry, ma'am. She rang for vases and did it all and told Mary and me to carry them upstairs."

Taylor sounded direly offended and resentful. Miss Todd groaned.

"I'll just peep at the room, but I'm sure you and Mary have made everything nice," she murmured.

"I think Mrs. Lawley ought to be comfortable, ma'am."

"Yes, Taylor. It'll be pleasant seeing her again, won't it?"

"Very, ma'am." Taylor coughed. "If you please, ma'am——"

With well-grounded apprehension Miss Todd asked: "What is it?"

"I'd like to leave this day month, ma'am."

"Is it because Mrs. Crabbie's going?"

"Not altogether, ma'am. You must see for yourself there can't be two ladies in the same house both giving orders. I didn't engage to take mine from Miss Anderson."

"I'm very sorry, Taylor."

"And I'm speaking for Mary and Rose too, please, ma'am. They wish to leave as well as me."

With leaden heart Miss Todd envisaged the future. Headed by Mrs. Crabbie, her obliging, efficient, well-trained, old-fashioned staff would all depart, leaving her with Fanny Anderson. How Fanny, like the daughters of the Philistines, would rejoice! Unless Miss Todd bestirred herself, a thing she hated doing, Fanny would undertake, single-handed, the management of the house, supervising Miss Todd's expenditure, criticizing her methods, accusing her of carelessness and extravagance, and her former employees of dishonesty, sharp practice, and small knaveries. She would select and import servants of her choice, creatures who would obey her, oblige her, ignoring and slighting Miss Todd. Angrily she told herself that the thing was impossible. How had Fanny obtained such sway? It must be stopped. It would have to be. When Fanny returned, accompanied by Mrs. Lawley, Miss Todd decided to tell her plainly that she had driven away Mrs. Crabbie and the maids, but if she, Fanny, left the Croft they might all be induced to remain.

It seemed so easy, so simple, yet when it came to the point could Miss Todd nerve herself to say any such thing?

How dared Fanny behave like this? She knew perfectly well that Miss Todd was down in the kitchen with Mrs. Crabbie, but instead of telling her that the pony-cart was waiting, or sending Taylor to do so, Fanny had calmly driven off in it herself. At the station heaven only knew what story she would tell Mrs. Lawley to account for Miss Todd's non-appearance. The visit would begin badly. Mrs. Lawley, old-fashioned, liking little courtesies, would probably feel resentful and slighted because her hostess had neglected to meet her. A headache was a poor excuse. Perhaps Fanny might not even mention that Miss Todd had one. Miserably she vibrated between the drawing-room and the hall, the steps and the beginning of the drive, listening for wheels. Instead, to her horror and stupefaction Smithson appeared. Had there been an accident? Miss Todd tottered to meet him, stammering incoherently: "Yes, yes, Smithson, what's wrong? Please tell me at once."

"There's nothing wrong in one sense, ma'am, but I can't make head nor tail of your orders, so I thought I'd better come and ask."

"I—I wanted the pony-trap here at half-past twelve."

"Yes, ma'am, and I brought it round to the minute. You wasn't there, and I waited, and then out comes the lady who's staying here. I drove you and her up from the station the evening you came home."

"Yes. Miss Anderson. Oh, has anything happened to her?"

"No, of course not, ma'am. She said as you wasn't feeling too grand and thought it might be wiser if you didn't go to the station. She was meeting Mrs. Lawley, she says, and she'd drive herself. I needn't trouble. Begging your pardon, ma'am, she just turned me out of the trap, as you might say, and off she went, and I suppose it's your orders, but all I can say is it's not like you."

"Oh! Oh, I see. It's—it's all right, Smithson. Miss Anderson suggested going to meet Mrs. Lawley as I had such a bad headache, but I didn't intend her to drive. She must have misunderstood——"

"Same as she did about Grier." Smithson grinned slowly. "Oh, well, as long as she don't smash up the trap or lame the pony."

"I'm sure she won't. Isn't that it now? Don't wait, Smithson."

"I prefer to take the cart round to the stables myself, ma'am."

Smithson, solid, stolid, immovable, remained in the background as the pony-trap, driven by Fanny Anderson, drew up. Fanny was handling the reins easily. Mrs. Lawley, a small, neat, white-haired elderly lady, compassed about by a quantity of luggage, sat behind her. Miss Todd wavered forward.

"Oh, Mrs. Lawley, I'm so glad to see you, but I was terribly sorry not to meet you myself."

"My dear Emily! This is nice. But there was no necessity for you to come. Your friend told me you were suffering from one of your headaches and had sent her instead. Good morning, Smithson. I'd expected to see you at the station, but Miss Anderson drove herself."

"Yes, ma'am. Good morning. Can I take the trap, ma'am?"

"You'd better help with the luggage first," Fanny told him. "Hadn't he, dearest Emily? How's the poor head? I hope you've been resting."

"It's better, thank you. Taylor and Mary will see about the luggage. Fanny, I must say I was very surprised at your going off to meet Mrs. Lawley behind my back."

"But, Emily, I'd no idea where you were. The trap came round and waited, and I was so afraid the train would come in and poor Mrs. Lawley find nobody on the platform and no way of getting up here."

"You could have asked one of the maids to find me."

"I didn't like to, after the way you found fault with me this morning." Fanny looked injured. "And as you are always so ridiculously careful of your servants I thought you'd be pleased at my saving Smithson the drive."

"Well, I wish you had let me go. Mrs. Lawley must have thought it odd, not quite polite or kind of me."

"She's a sensible woman and fully agreed with me that you were wiser not to exert yourself in this heat."

"Then you gave her the impression that I sent you instead, and tried to spare myself? It was too bad of you, Fanny."

Miss Todd turned her back on Fanny and rejoined Mrs. Lawley, who meantime had been greeting the two maids.

"Shall we go into the house, Mrs. Lawley? I hope you aren't very tired. Had you a comfortable journey?"

"Yes, thank you. It was rather hot."

"I know. I wish I had been able to meet you, but—— Oh, I'll explain later on."

Miss Todd escorted Mrs. Lawley upstairs. An uneasy glance over her shoulder ascertained that Fanny was not following.

"You look tired, Emily. Oh, of course, you poor thing, your loss—— And coming back here the first time after it—— Who is this Miss Anderson? She seems very capable and bright."

"Oh, yes," gasped Miss Todd. "Fanny's most capable."

"What delicious sweet peas!"

"I believe Fanny arranged them." Reluctantly Miss Todd felt compelled to acknowledge to herself that Fanny had performed her self-imposed task very gracefully and effectively, but how interfering, how unnecessary of her to undertake it! It was the hostess's place and privilege to put flowers in the visitor's room.

"My dear, they're most beautifully done. I wish I had had her for the altar vases. Do you remember how badly Miss Nightingale did them and my husband and I dared not say a word, she was so touchy?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Miss Todd.

"Tell me about Miss Anderson. I didn't know that there was to be anybody else staying here."

"Oh, Fanny and I met at Derriford. I was ill, you know, and she looked after me very kindly, and we came home together."

"I see. What a wise plan! You should not be alone, Emily."

"I don't mind. I suppose in time I shall get used to Papa's loss, but I find plenty to do."

"Of course you will. I'm very glad to be here again. We must have some good talks."

Miss Todd acquiesced, inwardly wondering how any private conversation between herself and Mrs. Lawley was to be achieved with Fanny perpetually present.

"You will want to get ready for lunch," she suggested. "I'll send Mary up to unpack for you."

"It was so nice to see her and Taylor again. I should like a word with Mrs. Crabbie after lunch, if convenient, and Timmins. Has Mary been promoted? Timmins was your personal maid."

"Mary is now. Timmins has—has left."

"Left? Timmins! My dear Emily, I should as soon have expected to hear that the steeple on the church at Steeple Batnors had fallen. Where has she gone?"

"She's—married. At least I think so. Oh, Mrs. Lawley, it's all such a long story. Please don't ask me to tell you now."

"Of course not, but—— *Timmins!* Don't you feel lost without her?"

"Mary's very good and before I came home Miss Anderson did a great deal. I—I hope you will like Fanny. Some people don't."

"How strange! I thought her exceptionally nice."

Miss Todd felt instantly ashamed of the mean thought which uncurled itself in her agitated mind. How wonderful it would be, what a solution of the growing difficulties and entanglements produced by Fanny's presence at the Croft, if Mrs. Lawley were to take a fancy to Fanny and suggest that she went to her as companion! Her own daughters were married. She was, as Miss Todd had informed Fanny, comfortably circumstanced, but she must be very lonely. It seemed too good to be true. Probably Mrs. Lawley did not intend to remain longer than a week or two. Fanny might be endured

if Miss Todd knew that she and Mrs. Lawley were departing together. A pang rent Miss Todd as she realized that in contemplating such an arrangement she was hardly acting fairly by her old friend. Mrs. Lawley ought to be acquainted with Fanny's disposition, Fanny's antecedents, Fanny's tendency to manage before she engaged her, but of course it might never come to that. If Mrs. Lawley would even invite Fanny for a short visit it would rid Miss Todd of her temporarily, and the hope of that was very sustaining. Once Fanny were out of the house——

Fanny was not. She was somewhere in it, probably agreeably aware that she had made a favourable impression on Mrs. Lawley and prepared to follow up the advantage. Miss Todd crept to her room, tidied herself mechanically, and having dispatched Mary to attend to Mrs. Lawley, went downstairs. Fanny, as she had dismally foretold, sat in the drawing-room, diligently perusing *The Times*.

"There you are, dearest Emily."

"Yes."

"You look much better. Now, wasn't I right to save you the drive and the wait at the station and everything?"

"If you please, Fanny, I'd rather not discuss it just now."

"Emily, you're not cross with me?"

"Well, Fanny, you can't expect me to be very pleased, can you? It was most officious of you to go off without a word of explanation to me——"

"I told you that I didn't know where you were."

"If you didn't like to ring and ask one of the maids to tell me the trap had come round, you could have looked for me."

"And if you'd been lying down you'd have said I disturbed you."

"You might have known I shouldn't have been lying down when it was nearly time for me to go and meet Mrs. Lawley. And turning Smithson out of the trap and driving it yourself! I must say, Fanny, I'm very surprised."

"Oh, Fanny, how unkind of you to take it this way! I meant to save you trouble—truly I did."

"You upset me very much. When Smithson came up and told me you'd driven off I imagined all sorts of things—an accident to you, or the pony and cart damaged."

"I shouldn't have undertaken to drive unless I'd been perfectly competent to do so." Fanny was sulking again.

"I didn't know that you could drive. And in any case it's Smithson's job and I wanted him to lend a hand with getting Mrs. Lawley's luggage into the trap."

"There was no necessity. Mrs. Lawley was talking to the station-master for ages, taking him out of his place exactly the way you did, and I put in the luggage."

"Fanny! Those heavy pieces! Papa always used to tease Mrs. Lawley about the amount she insisted she couldn't travel without. You shouldn't have managed them yourself."

"There wasn't a porter. Mr. Stubbs said something about 'Jack' having gone to his dinner, and he wanted to show Mrs. Lawley his garden, so they went off together, and—— Oh, here's Mrs. Lawley. Mrs. Lawley, I was just telling Emily about your flirtation with the station-master."

Fanny was assuming her arch mood. She laughed and Mrs. Lawley laughed too.

"You naughty girl! Flirtation indeed! It was delightful to see dear old Mr. Stubbs again, Emily, and not a bit changed. I'm afraid I kept Miss Anderson waiting, but he was so anxious that I should inspect his roses, and she said she would see about the luggage whilst I did. I hope I haven't delayed lunch?"

"No. There's the bell now. Shall we come?"

"Where's the lovely old gong? Have you left off sounding it?"

"It disturbed Emily," Fanny explained blandly.

"Oh, Fanny, it was you who insisted on the bell being rung instead." Miss Todd spoke with nervous sharpness.

"Did I, dearest? Only to spare your nerves, I assure you."

"I haven't any nerves."

Mrs. Lawley looked from one to the other. Miss Todd flushed. She must not let Fanny goad her into irritable speech.

Lunch passed off easily. Mrs. Lawley was anxious for news of old friends and former parishioners. The talk, purely local, Miss Todd felt convinced must bore Fanny, though she exhibited no signs of its doing so. She sat there quietly, exactly as she had done the day Mr. Massey was present at table, leaving the other two to converse together, putting in a word now and again, or answering pleasantly if addressed. Finally Mrs. Lawley, a twinkle in her eye, inquired: "And how's the sergeant-major?"

"Now, Mrs. Lawley, that's too bad of you!"

"As bossy as ever, I suppose?"

"Sybil's extremely competent."

"Very nice of you, my dear, to stand up for your friend, but—— Does Miss Anderson know what we're talking of?"

"No—and I'm sure she's finding it dreadfully dull. I'll tell you about the Karslakes another time—not that there's anything to tell. Oh, Bobby's won a scholarship at Winchester."

"That ought to be a help to his parents."

"I suppose so. Education seems so expensive nowadays. Fanny, won't you have some more of this trifle?"

"Thank you, Emily, I will."

At the conclusion of lunch Miss Todd found her plans for securing a *tête-à-tête* talk with her old friend rudely frustrated by her new one. Fanny announced affectionately that Mrs. Lawley and dearest Emily ought to lie down. Mrs. Lawley had had a hot, tiring train-journey and poor Emily had begun the day with a bad headache. A nice long rest until tea-time was Fanny's prescription for both.

"Very sensible of you, my dear. Then I'll take your advice and just go up to my room." Mrs. Lawley beamed upon Fanny. "Emily, I hope you'll do the same?"

"But what about you, Fanny?"

"I want to write some letters, and the drawing-room's delightfully cool. I noticed several advertisements in *The Times* to-day, and I think it would be a good thing if I answered one or two."

Fanny sighed gently.

"What kind of advertisements?" Mrs. Lawley demanded affably. "My dear husband occasionally procured books through advertising. He found it quite a satisfactory method of getting what he wanted, though I remember one time he was disgracefully taken in over a copy of *Crockford*."

"How very wrong, Mrs. Lawley!"

"Yes. It seemed additionally shocking to impose on a clergyman. But you haven't told me what you're looking for, Miss Anderson."

"A situation." Fanny smiled bravely.

"Oh, my dear! A situation? As—as what?"

Fanny shook her head sadly.

"I'm afraid it will have to be something in the way of a domestic post. I'm not certificated or accomplished or really clever at anything."

"You ought to find a post easily. Why not try being a companion?"

"I did try." Fanny spoke mournfully. "Emily will tell you, only I don't want to inflict my uninteresting affairs on you, Mrs. Lawley."

"My dear, I'm most interested. Do go on."

"Well, I—— Oh, Emily, you and Mrs. Lawley are standing. I'm so sorry. Do go and take a rest, both of you, and another time, Mrs. Lawley, if you care, I'll consult you about what I might do."

"I hope you will. Bye-bye, then, till tea-time. Are you coming, Emily?"

"If Fanny doesn't mind being left alone."

"Of course I don't. Oh, Emily, may we have tea in the garden again? It's so lovely under that beautiful copper beech."

"Certainly. I'll tell Taylor."

"That's my favourite spot too," declared Mrs. Lawley.

"I'm just going to tuck you up and then I'll start my letters," Fanny informed Miss Todd.

There was no escape. Miss Todd had her shoes removed, her flask of eau-de-Cologne placed beside her, her eiderdown draped over her as she lay on the sofa, and her blinds noiselessly lowered by Fanny Anderson. Then Fanny offered to do the same for Mrs. Lawley; and Miss Todd, grappling with a return of her headache, knew that the two were in Mrs. Lawley's room, Fanny executive, attentive, eminently capable, and Mrs. Lawley pleased, placid, submissive, and admiring. Fanny's artfulness enraged Miss Todd. She did not seem in the least abashed by Miss Todd's displeasure at her officious behaviour in meeting Mrs. Lawley. Instead, she had impressed Mrs. Lawley agreeably and no doubt intended to make use of her to further her efforts in the direction of obtaining employment. If only Mrs. Lawley would take Fanny off Miss Todd's hands! And before the latter hovered the problem of replacing Mrs. Crabbie, Taylor, Mary, Rose, and of course, Timmins. Fanny was wholly and solely to blame because Timmins had left and the rest were leaving. Ought Miss Todd to tell Mrs. Lawley of these impending departures? If she did—oh, dear! oh, dear!—it might open Mrs. Lawley's eyes to Fanny's true character and methods, and Mrs. Lawley would probably decline to employ or recommend her. Miss Todd *must* utilize Mrs. Lawley to rid herself of Fanny. She dared not let Fanny stay on after the servants had vanished, taking still firmer possession of Miss Todd, her house, her private affairs, her friendships, her daily life. The room was cool, the long couch comfortable, the light covering exactly the right texture, but Miss Todd could not sleep. She saw Fanny as a kind of human octopus, coiling her tentacles closer and closer, eventually squeezing all individuality and independence out of her, leaving her a subservient husk, terrified of Fanny, unable to resist Fanny, in Fanny's power, at Fanny's beck and call. If she gave her money as a bribe to go away Fanny would demand more and more. And why should

Miss Todd give her money in any case? Fanny had no claims upon her. She ought to go, pleasantly and peaceably, at the conclusion of her visit. It was tactless, stupid, inconsiderate of her to remain indefinitely. Miss Todd had never suggested that the invitation to stay at the Croft was for anything except a visit. How outrageous of Fanny to contemplate or hint that it might become a permanency! Vexatious, too, that Mrs. Lawley, unlike Mr. Massey or Mrs. Karslake, should have apparently taken quite a fancy to Fanny! They had both advised Miss Todd to get rid of her. Mrs. Lawley seemed inclined to think it a delightful arrangement for Miss Todd to have another woman for company. Miss Todd groaned. Mrs. Lawley didn't know Fanny Anderson. . . .

Unrefreshed, undecided, jaded, and nervy, Miss Todd went downstairs at tea-time. She found Fanny solicitously hovering round Mrs. Lawley under the copper beech. Hadn't Taylor brought Mrs. Lawley a footstool? Too bad of her to be so forgetful! Fanny would just run into the house and fetch it. Was that cushion really comfortable? Another one there made a difference Fanny found. Why, here was dearest Emily. Rested, Fanny hoped. Was she too tired to pour out tea for them all? If so, she had only to say, and Fanny would do it for her. Didn't Mrs. Lawley think that Emily had better spare herself as much exertion as possible?

"No, thank you, Fanny. I prefer to pour out."

"Is that wise, Emily? I agree with Miss Anderson. You're looking very tired still."

"Two against one. Better let me."

Miss Todd, thoroughly annoyed, refused with really astonishing firmness. Her annoyance deepened as she intercepted an exchange of glances between Mrs. Lawley and Fanny. Let her have her own way, Fanny's seemed to say. She hasn't much pleasure. It's a kindness to let her pour out. Mrs. Lawley's little nod confirmed Fanny's unspoken words. Emily was poorly, lately bereaved. She must be indulged, not crossed, and if she liked to tire herself that was her own affair.

"A wilful woman", etc.," Fanny sighed. "Did you get any sleep?"

"No."

"What a pity!" ejaculated Mrs. Lawley. "I had a lovely nap, and then this kind little person came in and told me it was tea-time and arranged my hair."

"Mary would have done that, Mrs. Lawley."

"Oh, I'm sure she would, dear Emily, but Miss Anderson was so clever. She's made it seem quite twice as much as it really is."

"I love dressing hair," Fanny murmured. "Yours is beautiful, Mrs. Lawley, so white. It makes you look very dignified, doesn't it, Emily?"

"Yes. Mine's at the mousey-grey stage." Miss Todd spoke absently. She was nearly as disgusted with Mrs. Lawley as she was with Fanny. She had hoped to find a champion in her, one who might deliver her from Fanny Anderson's yoke, but Mrs. Lawley had quite gone over to the enemy. She was smiling at Fanny now, a fatuous, approving smirk, and Fanny was smiling back. Both seemed leagued against Miss Todd, forcing her to do as Fanny wanted and Mrs. Lawley commended.

"And now, tell me about the Karslakes," Mrs. Lawley began.

"Oh, they're just the same. He's as absent-minded as ever, and she's very busy."

"So I expected. How that man hasn't poisoned half his patients by his muddle-headedness I can't imagine, and Sybil's always poking her finger into a fresh pie. Have you met Dr. and Mrs. Karlake yet, Miss Anderson?"

"Mrs. Karlake was here one evening."

"And what did you think of the sergeant-major? That was my dear husband's name for her."

"How clever! It just hits her off. Oh, I beg your pardon, Emily. I know she's a great friend of yours, but she does seem to run everybody."

"You're quite mistaken, Fanny."

"Am I, Mrs. Lawley?"

"No, my dear. That's exactly what I feel about Sybil Karlake. Emily, you've put sugar in my tea."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot you didn't take it."

"If Miss Anderson had poured out it wouldn't have happened."

How unreasonable Mrs. Lawley was! Her voice taut with suppressed exasperation Miss Todd replied: "I'll try to remember another time."

"And Sybil?" persisted Mrs. Lawley.

"I told you. She's—she's very busy."

"Who runs the G.F.S.? Sybil?"

"No. Mrs. Waring."

"I wonder she has time. Such a number of children! I suppose you haven't been inside the rectory since you returned?"

"Not yet. Mr. and Mrs. Waring called yesterday evening and she very kindly asked us both to tea. I suggested that Fanny should go as I couldn't."

"Now, why couldn't you?"

"Oh, I knew you were to be here."

"Well, that needn't have interfered with your accepting, my dear."

"I—I was afraid you wouldn't care about going."

"Of course I should not. My dear husband and I had the rectory as nice as we could make it, but Mrs. Waring's hopeless, so untidy. It would break my heart to see the place now."

"I'm sure I didn't want to accept, only Emily made such a point of it." Fanny pouted.

Miss Todd uttered a sudden exclamation and stared in horror at her guest.

"Oh, Fanny!"

"What's the matter, dearest Emily? Have you scalded yourself? I'm certain the spout of that kettle wants cleaning. I noticed yesterday that it was dripping all over your pretty tea-cloth."

"No." Miss Todd set down the kettle with a little clash. "It's—Fanny, wasn't it to-day that Mrs. Waring asked you to tea?"

"Of course it was."

"But—but why haven't you gone? Aren't you going? Mrs. Waring said four o'clock and it's twenty minutes past four now."

"I know."

Fanny gave her little chuckle and looked mischievously at Mrs. Lawley. The latter smiled back.

"I don't understand," wailed Miss Todd.

"It's quite simple, my dear." Mrs. Lawley patted her hand. "When she was doing my hair Miss Anderson told me about her engagement at the rectory, and I could see that she was very disinclined to go."

"Then why did you accept, Fanny, when Mrs. Waring asked you?"

"Dearest Emily, how could I get out of it? She was quite insistent, and I couldn't plead any other engagement. It isn't as though you'd helped me out. You said that you must stay with Mrs. Lawley and would prefer to go another time, but I was perfectly free." Fanny gulped. "I supposed, of course, that you wanted to be rid of me and have your old friend to yourself, but Mrs. Lawley said——"

"This poor little girl was quite distressed." Mrs. Lawley patted Fanny's hand as a change from Miss Todd's. "She consulted me upstairs and I told her it was perfectly simple. If she did not wish to go, she could ring up the rectory and tell Mrs. Waring she found it inconvenient. Mrs. Waring understood, didn't she, dear?"

"Oh, perfectly, Mrs. Lawley."

"And what excuse did you give her?" Miss Todd spoke in a hard, level voice. Mrs. Lawley raised her eyebrows and Miss Todd was irritably conscious of the disapproval conveyed by the little gesture. How unlike dear Emily to lose her temper! She knew that Mrs. Lawley was thinking this, but really Fanny's behaviour——

"I begged Miss Anderson to tell Mrs. Waring that I wanted her," Mrs. Lawley explained calmly. "There was no harm in that, was there, Emily?"

"No."

"You sound quite annoyed." Mrs. Lawley turned in surprise to look at her hostess. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing. As long as Mrs. Waring was not offended or hurt I suppose it's all right."

"Why should she be either? If anybody is entitled to be I consider it is myself."

"Oh, Mrs. Lawley, but why? What have I done?"

"Well, Emily, do you think it was very considerate to oblige Miss Anderson to accept an invitation she was obviously reluctant to, and on the very first day of my visit?"

"It looked, you know, Emily, as though you wanted me out of the way. I said so to Mrs. Lawley, and she was very sweet, told me I imagined this, but—but if I'm *de trop* I could easily ring up Mrs. Waring now and tell her I find I can come after all. She said they weren't very particular about punctuality."

"I don't think you ought to do that, Fanny."

"Nonsense, my dear! What a sensitive little person she is, Emily! You and I will find plenty of opportunities for a talk, if that's what she's thinking, though I'm quite certain we have nothing to say to one another that Miss Fanny mightn't hear."

"No." Miss Todd spoke dully, flatly, hopelessly. Once more Fanny had beaten her, and not only Fanny, but Mrs. Lawley. The latter had ranged herself openly on the side of the interloper. She was flattered and fascinated by Fanny, and Fanny was taking full advantage of the situation. Deftly, adroitly, she had escaped from having to go to tea at the rectory and leave Miss Todd alone with Mrs. Lawley. The latter had applauded her disinclination without fathoming her motives. Mrs. Lawley was, Miss Todd knew, not sorry to inconvenience and circumvent Mrs. Waring. How petty, how miserable all this was! If there were to be any coolness with the Warings it might lead to repeated awkwardnesses. In a village

the size of Little Batnors for Miss Todd of the Croft to be on unfriendly terms with the rector and his wife would never, never do. Dear Papa had always said: Don't quarrel in a small place, my dear. Wise Papa! It was all very well for Mrs. Lawley or Fanny. They could go away, would, in fact, be going shortly, Mrs. Lawley certainly; Fanny, Miss Todd hoped, equally certainly. And Miss Todd herself? She saw a legacy of disagreements and estrangements left in her guests' wake. Mr. Massey, Sybil Karslake, the Warings—Fanny was doing her best to alienate Miss Todd from all these. What lay behind it? And Mrs. Lawley, who, Miss Todd had hoped, would protect her from Fanny, who might have removed Fanny altogether, was taking Fanny's part, encouraging her to be discourteous to the Warings, and implying that Miss Todd had placed Fanny in an unpleasant position by obliging her to go to the rectory when she did not wish to. It was all too abominable, too unfair.

"I think"—with difficulty Miss Todd controlled her tears—"that if you and Miss Anderson don't mind I'll go in and lie down."

"Oh, poor Emily! Is your head bad again?"

Miss Todd nodded briefly.

"Shall I come with you?" Fanny offered eagerly.

"There's no necessity, thank you. You're quite sure you don't mind, Mrs. Lawley?"

"My dear, of course not. Don't make a stranger of me. I'm only sorry you are in pain."

"It will pass off if I lie down, I expect. I hope I'll be all right by dinner-time."

Miss Todd trailed away. She was leaving Fanny Anderson alone with Mrs. Lawley, but she did not care. Let Fanny make what mischief she chose. Miss Todd was past regretting or resenting it. All she craved was peace—peace without Fanny or Mrs. Lawley. What a fool she had been to invite her! The only hope was that Mrs. Lawley, having taken this fancy to Fanny, might express a wish to secure and enjoy her permanent companionship. Miss Todd felt bitterly disappointed in Mrs. Lawley. It was excusable enough for a weak creature like herself to have been so taken in by Fanny, but Mrs. Lawley, older, experienced, married, should have seen through her.

There was no use now in consulting Mrs. Lawley about the departures of Mrs. Crabbie and the rest of the staff. In all probability Mrs. Lawley, egged on by Fanny, would suggest Fanny herself to fill Mrs. Crabbie's place. Miss Todd could not bear to look at any future with Fanny occupying such an advantageous position. Her sole desire was that she might endure the rest of Mrs. Lawley's visit with outward dignity and decorum. . . .

The days dragged past. It was stuffy, enervating weather, hot and sunless, with no breath of wind to stir the oppressive atmosphere. Miss Todd suffered from repeated headaches, despite Fanny's daily administration of port. Fortunately Mrs. Lawley was not difficult to entertain as she had many friends and acquaintances about the neighbourhood whom she wished to see, and Miss Todd was only too glad to invite any of these to the Croft. This meant that meals, sojourns in the garden, the long, light evenings saw other people there to relieve the strain of being alone with Mrs. Lawley and Fanny. Fanny's attitude towards the older lady was perfect. She listened attentively and unweariedly to Mrs. Lawley's talk of former days, wound wool for her, gave her her arm when Mrs. Lawley would not be offended by

the gesture implying that she was elderly, and Miss Todd hoped fervently that Fanny was making herself indispensable. Once she broached the subject of Fanny's future to Mrs. Lawley when, by a miracle, she and her visitor were alone.

"You seem to like Fanny, Mrs. Lawley."

"So I do, my dear. She's very charming to an old woman."

"Has she said anything to you about her future—when she leaves here, I mean?"

"Not a word. Is she leaving?"

"Of course." Miss Todd felt unexpectedly brave. "I only invited her on a visit. I never intended her to be a permanency."

"Oh! I thought— You seem so happy together and she's so devoted to you, Emily, that I imagined she was here indefinitely—your companion, in fact."

"But I don't think I want to have a companion."

"You ought to have somebody. Your heart——"

"Oh, that's only Fanny's nonsense."

"I'm not sure that it is. She was anxious about you and gave me a little hint, and I've been watching you, and, Emily, I don't believe you're at all well."

"Oh, but I am."

"No, my dear. These constant headaches——"

"I always get them in the summer. Don't you remember how white I used to look in church and Mr. Lawley was so kind, telling me to slip out by the side door if I felt faint?"

"Yes. Yes. But you seem to find stairs trying and you're—forgive me, but we are old friends, you and I—rather, shall we say, inclined to be irritable. That isn't like you."

Again Miss Todd blamed the heat.

"It's not altogether the weather. You had a very trying time with your dear father's long illness and then his death, and you were ill after you went away."

"A chill. Anybody might get one."

"My dear Emily, you sound quite fierce."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to be rude, but I hate my health fussed over."

"That's just what I was saying. Little things annoy you in a way they never used to. I can tell you're fretting about Timmins' ingratitude. I couldn't have believed that she would behave so badly."

"Did Fanny tell you?"

"I had the whole story from her. She said she wanted to spare you the pain of telling me yourself as it had upset you so much."

"What did she say?"

"Only that Timmins had treated you atrociously, giving notice and leaving you when you were laid up in a strange place. You mustn't mind my saying, Emily, that this fairy-tale of her going to be married sounded very odd and unconvincing to me."

"And was that all Fanny told you?"

"She didn't know anything more. As she said, she was an outsider, a stranger, very reluctant to interfere in a matter which concerned only you and your maid. She seems to have been tactful and helpful in the emergency."

She didn't say a word about having looked after you. It was you who did that."

"Yes. Fanny was very kind."

(Very kind. Oh, very kind, and always right, of course. Fanny was always right.)

"And you've never heard of Timmins since?"

"No, never."

"Has she not written to you or anybody here?"

"I don't think so. She hasn't to me, and if anybody else had had a letter from her I'm sure they'd have told me."

"It's most unsatisfactory. The only thing you can do is to put her out of your mind."

"Yes. I try to."

"If you still had her I shouldn't say anything." Mrs. Lawley's tones were soft, almost purring. "But as she's gone I feel you require someone, especially a person of your own social status who would be more with you than Timmins."

Miss Todd stiffened in her chair. "You mean like Fanny?"

"Yes. She has no home and needs to look for a post. Why not offer her the one of companion to you? It would be quite easy to arrange about the salary through Mr. Massey."

"He doesn't like Fanny. I'm certain he wouldn't approve."

"Not like her? How absurd! And surely, Emily, he hasn't the power to act for you in a matter of this kind?"

"Papa left him my trustee. He manages all my money affairs."

"But engaging a companion doesn't come into that category, does it?"

"I—I don't know."

"I should call it very interfering if he objected to your engaging Miss Anderson." Mrs. Lawley spoke meditatively. Miss Todd saw her frown and divined the reason. In Mr. Lawley's lifetime Mr. Massey had been on the vestry of the little church. They did not always see eye to eye. Miss Todd remembered Mr. Massey complaining to Papa about certain actions of the rector's which had earned his disapproval, and later on Mr. Massey had taken the Warings' part in the famous battle of the stair-carpet. Additionally, he had condemned Mrs. Lawley for remaining on in Little Batnors after she was left a widow, criticizing the new rector and more or less unconsciously stirring up a good deal of trouble in the parish. Probably his censure had come to Mrs. Lawley's ears. Obviously she was not sorry for the opportunity to question his authority over Miss Todd.

"But I don't want to engage her." Miss Todd's protest came faintly.

"Why not? She's exactly suitable."

"Because I don't require a paid companion and I'm not going to have one—certainly not Fanny."

"My dear Emily, is that any way to speak to me?"

"No. I beg your pardon, but I don't intend to be coerced into engaging her. If you like her so much, why not have her yourself?"

"Oh, that's out of the question."

"Why? You're every bit as much alone as I am."

"I shan't be very shortly. Mabel is coming home and she'll live with me."

Miss Todd's heart sank. Mabel Egerton, the Lawleys' younger daughter,

was married to a missionary in central China. Miss Todd had imagined her safely and indefinitely there with her husband and family. She murmured some surprise, and Mrs. Lawley proceeded to explain and thereby to extinguish Miss Todd's last hope of ridding herself of Fanny Anderson.

"She hasn't been well. In fact, I'm quite worried. Her letters take so long to come and when they do they don't tell me very much about herself. Anyway, she said in the last one that she was sailing for home, and I think the steamer ought to arrive early next month."

"Oh!"

"I was going to tell you all this, my dear, and say that I'm afraid I must bring my charming visit to a close this week."

"Oh, dear! Couldn't you stay a little longer if Mabel's not to be home till August?"

"There's too much to see to. Emma and Kate are very good, but I'll find a lot to arrange. It isn't as though Mabel was coming for a short time. It may be at least a year. It depends on her health, of course."

"Yes, I see."

"So I shan't be lonely. Otherwise I'd feel tempted to steal Miss Anderson from you."

"I wish you'd find her a post. When you leave it would be a good time for her to go too. I'm"—Miss Todd twisted her hands—"making changes."

"Well, keep Miss Anderson. That's my advice."

Miss Todd had kept Miss Anderson. For thirty years she had kept her. The sour remembrance made her bite her lip now. Thirty years. . . . Thirty years. . . .

It proved no use fighting either Fate or Fanny. All very well now to look back and decide that she might have acted differently. If she had been able to change her entire character and disposition Miss Todd could perhaps have succeeded in dislodging Fanny, but being what she was and Fanny being what Fanny was the feat became impossible. Thirty years. Thirty years of Fanny.

If only Fanny had not always been so supremely, unswervingly right! If only Miss Todd could once have proved her direly, irreparably wrong! Even this lukewarm, minor satisfaction was denied her through her thirty years of servitude. Fanny alienated Miss Todd's old friends and circumvented her new ones. She chose Miss Todd's clothes, her stair-carpet, her note-paper. Miss Todd went out, with Fanny's permission, and came in when Fanny had said she was to come in. She wanted a wireless, but Fanny objected. She preferred cats, but Fanny decreed the purchase of a dog which might induce Miss Todd to take more exercise. Fanny interfered in the house, the garden, the conservatory, the stables. After the original staff left servants came and went, but it was never Fanny who must be blamed for their abrupt, explosive departures. She exercised sway and supervision over Miss Todd's person, her wardrobe, her daily routine. Even her thoughts did not seem her own property, but Fanny's. Sometimes she wondered wildly why she remained such a slave. In the end she decided that it was simply for want of the necessary courage to tell Fanny that she must go. Occasionally crazy visions of financial bribery danced before Miss Todd's eyes, but she knew that if ever it came to the point she could never face Fanny's aghast anger, Fanny's stern denunciations of dearest Emily's ingratitude, her unkindness, her callousness in turning a faithful

friend, however substantially subsidized, adrift in a cold world. Year after year she braced herself to endure Fanny, to obey Fanny, to be obliged and grateful to Fanny for an indefinite further period. Only Death could release her from Fanny.

Fate had always favoured Fanny, never Miss Todd. Mr. Massey, expressing himself seriously displeased at her disregard of his advice and her inexplicable infatuation for Miss Anderson, withdrew more and more from his position as friend and counsellor. The Karslakes grew cool. After Dr. Karslake's death Sybil went to live with a married sister in Devonshire. Miss Todd dared not even suggest inviting her to pay the Croft a visit. The Warings left Little Batnors on Mr. Waring's appointment to another living. The years dragged by, dim, featureless tracts of time. Very little that was unusual, enjoyable, or interesting stood out from the three dull decades. She and Fanny were middle-aged when they met. They became elderly and then grew old. Little Batnors was accustomed to the two figures, always together, Miss Todd small and thin, Fanny small and stout. In the village, at church, on the road, they were never apart. Strangers mistook Miss Todd for the paid companion and Fanny for the mistress of the Croft. Miss Todd was too devitalized to care whether they did. Fanny and she rarely went away. The former discouraged holiday-making. Wasn't there plenty to do at home? she would demand gaily. Surely dearest Emily didn't find it dull? Fanny herself was always busy. She did the house-keeping, supervised the servants, managed Miss Todd. The outside world was remote. Fashions changed. More and more motors replaced dog-carts and traps. Wireless superseded the piano and the gramophone. A great war, national calamities such as strikes and the deaths of kings swept over England, yet they did not seem to matter to Miss Todd or Fanny Anderson. Occasionally Miss Todd regretted that Fanny had chosen so decidedly to devote her time and her abilities to one individual—herself—instead of entering wider fields. Why, with her energy, her activity, her ruthlessness Fanny might have been mayoress of Steeple Batnors by now. She said this once, half-humorously, but Fanny only smiled gently. Save to look after her dearest Emily she had no ambition.

Miss Todd was seventy-eight and nothing could happen to her except death. Within the last few weeks she had begun to grow frightened. Fanny possessed such a remarkable facility for bringing the conversation round to Miss Todd's latter end. No matter with what topic it started—the weather, the ritualistic tendencies of Mr. Winchester, the rector, the iniquities of a new cook—sooner or later it always reverted to Miss Todd's impending demise and testamentary dispositions. . . .

"Everybody ought to make a will."

"Yes, dearest Fanny."

"Don't you agree with me?"

"I said I did."

"Well, I didn't hear you."

Fanny was growing decidedly deaf, but never would admit it.

"I'm sorry, Fanny. I said yes, which meant that you were right."

"Have you made yours?"

"Fanny, you asked me that yesterday and I told you that of course I had."

"Oh!"

A pause. Miss Todd remarked that the roses hadn't done so well this year.

"It's the dry weather. We want rain. Emily?"

"Yes?"

"Did you make your will recently?"

What a stupid question! reflected Miss Todd irritably. How could I make a will without your knowing, and what's more, hearing all about it?

"Not very recently."

"When?"

"Soon after Papa died, but, really, Fanny, I don't see——"

"What don't you see?"

"How it concerns you."

Fanny avoided the question and its implications easily. She was always able to do this, Miss Todd mused with rebellion.

"Soon after your father died? But, Emily, that's more than thirty years ago, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"We've lived together for thirty years. Your father had died shortly before I met you. I never knew him."

"No, dear, of course you didn't."

(Papa would have made short work of Fanny.)

"In that case—— Hadn't you better alter it, Emily? It's so long ago."

"I don't want to alter it. Why should I?"

"Because everybody you've left money to must be dead by this time."

"Oh, no. Mrs. Lawley's grand-children aren't, or Bobby Karslake, and the charities that are going to benefit are there just the same."

"Mrs. Lawley's grand-children? Bobby Karslake? Charities? H'm. I suppose you're a very rich woman, Emily?"

"I'm well-off."

"I hope you made a sensible will?"

"Mr. Massey advised me and drew it up. He thought I'd acted quite wisely." Miss Todd sighed. The loss of Mr. Massey's friendship had been a heavy price to pay for Fanny's constant company. He had continued to act as her trustee, but the old, friendly intimacy was early killed by Fanny. Mr. Massey had told Miss Todd plainly that as long as Miss Anderson continued at the Croft, making a third during every conversation between himself and Miss Todd, he must decline to visit there. Any necessary business could be transacted at his office or by his partner. Miss Todd shivered. The final cleavage had come after Mr. Massey, with Miss Todd's reluctant and tremulous permission, suggested to Fanny that she left. Fanny merely laughed. Unless dearest Emily told her that she wished her to leave Fanny was most certainly not going to take orders from Mr. Massey. He had implored Miss Todd to support him, to tell Fanny that she must go, but Miss Todd, flustered, abjectly terrified of Fanny, half-hypnotized by her stronger personality, had failed Mr. Massey—and lost him. Her trustee had despised her, she knew, for a weak, pitiful fool, subservient to Fanny, imposed on by Fanny, exploited by Fanny. Until his death he would have remained her friend, but Fanny was the obstacle. For Fanny she had given up Mr. Massey. Fool! Fool! Fool!

"I'd like to see it," Fanny went on.

"I'm afraid you can't. My solicitors have it."

"Isn't there a copy here?"

"No."

Fanny began to add up some accounts.

"I thought we might have a gooseberry tart at dinner, Fanny. The gooseberries are lovely just now."

"Pastry's not good for you, dearest Emily. It gives you indigestion, and so do gooseberries, and that's bad for your heart."

"I'm sure it isn't. I love gooseberry tart and I've eaten it summer after summer."

"Well, if you like to make yourself ill it's no use my saying anything."

"Ill? I'm not going to be ill."

"You never can tell, can you? I'm always anxious about you in the hot weather. Walking back from the village this morning I thought you were dreadfully breathless and your lips looked quite blue."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I'm sorry, Emily, but it's true."

Two old women, for Fanny was old as well as herself, shut up together. Nothing could happen to either—except death. She wasn't going to die. Her heart had nothing wrong with it. Mamma had had heart disease, but that was different. Fanny might die equally well. She was stout. Stout people often had a stroke. . . .

The drawing-room was very hot. A fly buzzed up and down the window. Fanny was muttering over her accounts, adding up how she had spent Miss Todd's money. For thirty years Fanny had been spending Miss Todd's money. Was she reckoning on outliving her and continuing to spend it? No, she shouldn't. She shouldn't.

"Emily?"

"Yes, dear?"

"You know about adding a codicil to your will, don't you?"

"Of course."

"It's quite easy."

"But I don't want to add one. My will stands just as it is now."

Their conversations were always alike these days. Death, wills, money, legacies. Fanny's hints were all the same. Surely she did not, could not imagine herself entitled to be a beneficiary under Miss Todd's will? All these years—thirty years—Miss Todd had paid her an ample salary, two salaries, in reality, as Fanny maintained that ever since Mrs. Crabbie's departure she saved Miss Todd the expenses of a housekeeper and ought to be given the equivalent emoluments of the same. She should have plenty saved. In any case she might not outlive Miss Todd, or, if she did, only for a short period. Then there would be a fresh set of death-duties, new burdens on the estate. Money was not what it had been. Income-tax was extortionate. Fanny ought to buy an annuity with her hoard. She'd get excellent terms at her age. At her age, Miss Todd reflected bitterly. I don't know, but I expect she's older than I am. . . .

"Who will get the Croft, dearest Emily?" Fanny demanded suddenly.

"I've no idea."

"No idea! Haven't you left it to anybody?"

"No. It's part of my estate. I suppose it will be sold."

Fanny sighed mournfully.

"I hate to think of anybody here except you and me."

"Oh, that's nonsense. What does it matter who lives in it after we're both dead?"

"Both? But we aren't likely to die at the same time, you know."

"You can't tell which of us will go first."

"Your heart," murmured Fanny.

"Anyway, I'm thin. I'd stand an illness better. You're far too stout, Fanny. It would go very hardly with you if you had anything serious—pneumonia, for instance."

Miss Todd was quite shocked by the vicious satisfaction it gave her to picture Fanny suffering from pneumonia.

"I think you're very rude, Emily." Fanny was dignified, offended, as usual instantly putting Miss Todd in the wrong.

"I'm sorry, Fanny, but I do hate being cross-questioned about my money affairs."

Fanny went back to her accounts.

Sarah, the latest cook, looked in. Miss Todd smiled at her.

"Oh, Sarah, I was just saying how fine the gooseberries are now. Could you make a gooseberry tart for dinner?"

Sarah hesitated and glanced at Fanny.

"Miss Anderson ordered a rice shape and stewed prunes, ma'am."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, dearest Fanny. I didn't know. All the same, I should like a gooseberry tart, Sarah."

"Very well, ma'am."

"What do you want, Sarah?" Fanny demanded.

"The man's here about the leak in the scullery, ma'am."

"Tell him to get on with the job and I'll see him when it's finished. It's disgraceful his only coming now. I telephoned two days ago."

"Yes, ma'am."

Sarah withdrew.

"I wish, Emily, you would not interfere."

"Interfere?"

"Yes. Giving Sarah orders like that."

Miss Todd said gently: "Sarah's my cook, Fanny."

"Well, I'm your housekeeper. It's my province to arrange the meals."

"You always do, don't you? I never object."

"No, dearest Emily; but you do manage to make matters a little difficult for me."

"I? Difficult? How? I'm sure, Fanny, you have a perfectly free hand. You settle what you like, order what you want, and I pay. That's the only thing I have to do with the management of the house."

Hostility loomed in the hot atmosphere of the luxurious room.

"Yes, Emily, that's all perfectly true." Fanny drew up her stout little figure with dignity. "I arrange the meals, and give the orders, but when you countermand them and ask for something entirely different it makes it awkward."

"But, Fanny, I didn't. I simply suggested that as gooseberries were in season just now we might have a tart."

"I had already arranged what we are having to-night."

"So Sarah said. A horrid combination, stewed prunes and rice shape."

"Very wholesome."

"There's nothing unwholesome about gooseberry tart."

"Not for most people. I, for instance, can eat it, but it doesn't agree with you."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, ring for Sarah and tell her to make one, but don't blame me when it upsets you."

With the satisfied air of one who had delivered her soul Fanny resumed her accounts. Miss Todd could imagine the little smile parting Fanny's lips. She knew perfectly well that Miss Todd would never dare to give such an order in her own house.

Years ago Fanny had quarrelled with most of the local work-people. The man would have come all the way from Market Batnors to mend that leak. He ought to be offered a cup of tea or a glass of cider. If Miss Todd went out of the room she might encounter Sarah or Elisabeth, the housemaid (the domestic staff at the Croft was now reduced to these two, with Fanny as commander-in-chief), and could ask one or other to see that the man did not go away unrefreshed. She rose to her feet.

"Where are you going, dear?"

"I want something from my room."

"Well, let me get it. You know I like you to spare yourself the stairs as much as possible. Why you won't be sensible and have a lift installed I can't imagine."

"It would ruin the appearance of the hall."

"Not at all. You could put it at the back and move the grandfather clock to the other side."

"There's no necessity for a lift, Fanny. We're neither of us as decrepit as all that yet."

"Anyway, do take the stairs slowly. Can't I go instead? What is it you want?"

"A letter I must answer. It's in my bureau."

Fanny could hardly insist on fetching a letter from a piece of furniture which Miss Todd kept locked. She walked out of the room. Elisabeth was coming up the kitchen stairs. Miss Todd advanced nervously.

"Has the man finished yet, Elisabeth?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. It'll be a longish job and he may have to come back to-morrow. He says it ought to have been seen to days ago."

Elisabeth spoke with relish. All the household knew of, and resented, Fanny's dislike of work-people. She avoided calling them in as long as she could. It doesn't affect her, Miss Todd reflected bitterly. She hasn't to pay for them.

"Did you want to speak to him, ma'am?" Elisabeth asked.

"Oh, no. No, certainly not. Miss Anderson told Sarah that she intended to see him before he went, but as he's not ready it's no use her going down. I—I wish you would give him something to drink. It's such a hot day."

"Very well, ma'am."

The servants supported the farce of Miss Todd's authority, but both knew, and she knew that they knew, that Fanny Anderson was the real mistress of the house.

"Thank you, Elisabeth."

Miss Todd trailed upstairs. Fanny's increasing bulk and growing deafness were tardy blessings for which she was thankful. No longer could Fanny move noiselessly and listen outside a door. She was too stout to effect her

escape easily when a conversation ended, and she missed a good deal owing to her impaired hearing. Miss Todd secretly rejoiced. Fanny could not have overheard this brief interview with Elisabeth.

The letter was found and Miss Todd came downstairs again. Fanny was not in the drawing-room, but a little later Miss Todd realized that she was puffing her way up from the kitchen. Rigid with apprehension, she sat at the old bureau, wondering whether Fanny had been finding fault with the plumber's man, overseeing his work, criticizing his methods, reprimanding him for slackness, threatening to complain to his employers. She never would realize how things had changed. The working classes held the upper hand now. Gone for ever were the days of civility, prompt service, obligingness, deference, class distinctions, pleasant relations between master and man. Fanny still continued to bully servants and subordinates and no one was more surprised than she when these resented it and left. Of the old staff at the Croft only Grier remained. Smithson had been pensioned off years before and went to live with a married daughter near Twickenham. Miss Todd and Fanny so seldom required to go any distance that the former turned a deaf ear to Fanny's suggestions of a car and a chauffeur-gardener. A younger man, with whom Fanny waged perpetual warfare, looked after the gardens and hot-houses, but Grier still lived at the lodge. All Fanny's arts, Fanny's demands, Fanny's blunt orders to Miss Todd had failed to evict him. He opened the lodge-gates to a tradesman's van or a very occasional visitor, and worked in his own plot behind the little place, and Miss Todd's happiest moments (her only happy ones, she told herself dismally sometimes) were those she spent in the familiar parlour with Grier. He stood to her for the one link with the old days which Fanny had so ruthlessly smashed. To Grier, Miss Todd could talk of her father and Mr. Massey, of things and people and incidents and jests dating from a life unspoiled by Fanny Anderson. Grier was over seventy, wise and sage and understanding. With Grier, Miss Todd did not feel such a fool. To him she was always the mistress. Fanny he hated, and Fanny's habit of exploring, prowling, prying about Grier's premises enraged him and annoyed Miss Todd. It was no use saying anything. Let her poke round, especially as it enabled Miss Todd to sit in the parlour and talk to Grier. . . .

"Emily!"

"Yes?"

"That man was such a long time I thought I'd better go down. Sarah's so stupid she might have let him go away without telling me. It's a good thing I went. What do you think I found?"

"I—I don't know. Is it a bad leak, Fanny?"

"He says it is. Of course that's just an excuse to make a long job of it and run up an extortionate bill."

"Oh, dear!"

"But that isn't what matters." (No, it doesn't to you. You won't have to pay it, reflected Miss Todd.) "You'll hardly believe me, but when I came into the kitchen there were the three of them, Sarah and Elisabeth and this man, all drinking cider."

"Well, why shouldn't they? It's dreadfully hot, and mending a leak's a horrid business."

"Cider! At half-past three in the afternoon! The maids stood up—I will say that for them—but this fellow just lounged there in his shirt-sleeves

never stirring when I appeared, and when I asked him whether he was paid to sit and drink other people's cider or to do the work he'd been sent for, he was downright insolent."

"I'm sure he didn't mean to be. Pollard's men are always so nice. As for the cider, Fanny, as I said, it's hot and he'd come a long way. You needn't grudge it to him."

"I don't. But the impudence—— And Sarah or Elisabeth must have opened one of those big flagons specially."

Fanny sat down, panting with heat and indignation. How short her neck was! If she didn't take care and avoid letting herself give way to these rages she might very easily have a stroke. A stroke! Not like poor Papa's, which had meant years of semi-helplessness before the two succeeding strokes ended in death, but an apoplectic seizure, killing her in a few hours. Fanny dead! Miss Todd gasped. Never had she imagined such a thing before. Fanny was always right, and never ceasing to proclaim so positively, in and out of season, that dearest Emily was certain to die before her, dearest Emily had meekly accepted the fact——

——until now. Now it did not seem so inevitable. She was thin, wiry, had never known a serious illness, and as for her heart—— Fanny was always emphasizing Miss Todd's heart for her own purposes. It was perfectly good. Of course she was old and must wear out gradually, but there was nothing wrong with her. She might—O blissful, unbelievable possibility!——outlive Fanny.

"Has he finished?" she asked.

"No. He has to go to another job somewhere else, he said, and he wouldn't promise to come back before next week. It's most annoying. Sarah says he told her the scullery sink wasn't to be used."

"Well, Fanny, you know she said at least a fortnight ago that she was certain there must be a leak, and you wouldn't let me ring up Pollard and get somebody to look at it."

"There was no leak then. I'm positive."

"All the same, it's as well to have any defect seen to immediately."

"Then you'd have said you had to pay for it and I was running up bills unnecessarily."

"Oh, Fanny, that's not fair. I never find fault with your way of managing. Very often I don't even look at the bills when they come in, and I never ask to see your accounts."

"All the same, Emily, I feel that you don't trust me. You were quite disagreeable when I suggested ordering more port the last day we were in Market Batnors."

"Well, dear, I couldn't see how it could possibly be required so soon again. We had a case fairly recently, and I only drink it at eleven every morning."

"Then I suppose you imply that I'm a secret tippler and help myself to your port behind your back."

"Please don't say things like that, Fanny. You know perfectly well that I never meant anything of the kind."

Miss Todd took refuge in dignified silence. Fanny puffed and snorted and muttered to herself. After a while she went back to her accounts and Miss Todd began to write a letter. Peace reigned until Fanny reverted to the evergreen, detestable topic.

"Emily, I was wondering—— You said you hadn't left this house separately in your will to anybody?"

"No. There's no one particular I want to have it."

"Then what's to become of it, dearest?"

"I've told you already. It goes into the estate. I suppose it will be sold, but with the servant difficulty I don't think many people will be anxious to buy anywhere so big and inconvenient."

"You won't put in central heating?"

"Certainly not. I don't like it."

"Well, I do. I think it would be lovely. I dread these bleak passages every winter."

"You have a fire in your bedroom, haven't you?"

"Yes; but it isn't good for either of us to go out of a warm room into a corridor like a vault."

"You've managed to survive thirty years of it, Fanny."

Miss Todd's tone was dry.

"I was thinking of you, not myself."

"You needn't. I hate central heating, and installing it would involve weeks of having workmen here, and you know how much you dislike them about the place."

"It would be worth it for the increased comfort."

(Comfort! You fat slug! I hope you're finding it very comfortable now, under damp earth, with worms in it.)

"Well, I'm not going to have it. For one thing, it might only be a year or two more for one or both of us."

"That reminds me, weren't we talking about the Croft and what would happen to it eventually?"

"You asked me about it. As I said, I don't imagine it will find a private purchaser. Very likely it will be pulled down and bungalows erected on the site. They're building all those new ones between the village and Market Batnors."

"Oh, what a hateful idea!"

"We shan't be here to see them."

"No, but—— I might be."

"And not me? I see."

"Well, dearest Emily, you know that with your heart—— You may go quite suddenly, and it's only wise to put your affairs in order."

"They are in order."

"But you told me you hadn't left anybody your house. I call that foolish."

"There is no one it would be the slightest use to."

"Isn't there? Oh, Emily, what about poor little me?"

"You?"

"Yes, dearest."

Miss Todd stared at Fanny.

"You mean—— You think that I should leave you the Croft?"

"I certainly do. It's been my home for so long now that I can't bear the thought of having to leave it when you die."

"Oh, I hope I'm going to live to a ripe old age."

"But you can't tell. Supposing you died within the next few months? The Croft, my home, would go to strangers, or, as you suggested, what's

far more dreadful, be pulled down. Where would I go? No one would want me. I've no relations, no money."

"Fanny, you ought to have saved something. All these years with me you've had hardly any expenses. You can't truly say you've no money. Why don't you put what you have into an annuity?"

"And wait six months before I got a penny? No, thank you. Besides, it would only bring in very little. I couldn't live on that. Not after the Croft."

"But you couldn't afford to keep up the Croft. It's a very expensive house. It needs at least two servants, and the garden is a constant drain. Don't be ridiculous."

"I could keep it up, Emily, if you left me a sufficient income with it."

Miss Todd sat aghast.

"Fanny! You mean that I ought to leave you Papa's money, Papa's house? You—a stranger!"

"I'm not a stranger. We've been devoted friends for thirty years, you and I."

Only because I couldn't get rid of you, pondered Miss Todd.

"I think you ought to, Emily."

"I don't see that, Fanny."

"You called me a stranger just now—most hurtful, most unkind. I'd like to know what those other people are, young Dr. Karslake and the Egertons. You said they were all getting legacies from you."

"They are the grand-children of my old friend who knew Papa, and Bobby Karslake is my godson."

"I know you paid for his medical training and I'm certain you send money to that mother of his."

"Sybil is badly off, and if I do, Fanny, what business is it of anybody's? The money's mine."

"Then it should be fairly distributed at your death. If you don't want me to have the Croft, Emily, you ought to leave me enough to live on comfortably in a house of my own."

"Really, I can't see that, Fanny. You have no claim. I mean, you're not related to me in any way."

"They aren't either."

"Papa wouldn't have approved."

"But he didn't tie the money up?"

"Oh, no."

"You can leave it as you choose?"

"Of course."

"Then you ought to make a new will—at once—and in my favour."

"In—yours? Everything to you?"

"For my lifetime. Why not? I've nobody to get anything I could leave, so I'd be quite willing for those other people to have what you've left them at my death, but I certainly consider, Emily, that you should make me your principal legatee after all I've done for you."

What have you done for me? Miss Todd asked herself with silent bitterness. You alienated me from my old friends. You separated me from Mr. Massey and lost me his advice and help. You drove away all my old servants except Grier, and you would have turned him off too if I hadn't, for once in my life, stood firm. You've spent my money as you pleased and

managed my house and ordered my days and my hours just as it suited you, and you never let me call my soul my own since the evening you stepped over my threshold, and now you expect me to leave you my house and my fortune and die as soon as possible in order that you may enjoy both.

She stared at Fanny as though seeing her for the first time. So this was what it all led up to in the end, these probing hints and impertinent questions? Fanny Anderson was determined to secure Miss Todd's money.

I won't, Miss Todd resolved. I shan't leave her a penny. It's monstrous, outrageous of her to expect it. And even for her lifetime— Supposing I died first, she might live for another ten years. All that time she'd be keeping other people out of the money I want them to have. Bobby Karslake is only a struggling doctor. The Egertons will find any extra a help. They didn't get Mrs. Lawley's money. She left it away from them because she disliked Mabel's husband marrying again after her death. And in any case a lot of it died with her. They ought to have it. Mabel knew I'd left it to them. Fanny hasn't a shadow of right to one farthing. . . .

"I don't agree, Fanny."

"Why not? I'm not robbing anybody. You ought to want me to have everything. You'd die with your mind at ease if you knew I was provided for."

"I hope I'm not going to die for ages."

"But you might. Just think, Emily, what it will be like for me to be turned adrift at my age."

"You won't be. As I said, you should have quite enough put by to provide for your last few years. You're old too, Fanny. You wouldn't enjoy the house or the money for very long, perhaps."

"Well, I consider that I ought to have both. I don't like to influence you to act against your own wishes, but I must say I'm very surprised at your stingy, peculiar attitude towards your oldest and best friend. Grudging me a roof over my head and a modicum of comfort when you can't enjoy either yourself! It's—it's horrible of you."

Miss Todd wondered apprehensively which of her moods Fanny was going to be in for the rest of the day. These varied from displaying downright bad temper to sulking, or else assuming a pose of deep injury. She did not know what she dreaded most. At the moment Fanny had returned to another wrestle with her accounts and Miss Todd continued to write her interrupted letter. Inwardly she was seething with anger. Fanny's attitude, Fanny's cool claims upon her, Fanny's monstrous demands were unbelievable. She would not do it. To leave Fanny Anderson everything for her lifetime? Never!

Tea was partaken of in a rather constrained atmosphere. Elisabeth looked very sullen because Fanny pointed out that she had a smut on her nose, and Miss Todd trembled lest the maid should give notice. Servants were growing scarcer and scarcer. Little Batnors remained remote and lethargic. The nearest cinema was at Market Batnors, and the dark, ill-lit local roads, the few shops, and the absence of young life or any form of amusement prevented women from taking service in the place. If she did secure a tolerably suitable specimen, sooner or later—generally sooner—Fanny's temper and exactions drove the woman away. Miss Todd had lost track of the number of cooks and housemaids she and Fanny had had during the last thirty years. Since Fanny goaded Mrs. Crabbie and her satellites into leaving there had been no comfort, no certainty, no stability

about the domestic arrangements. She did not blame the servants. Fanny was manifestly impossible to work for. Often Miss Todd envied them for their power to give notice and escape. She could not. Fanny and she would be together for life.

And now it appeared that Fanny was reckoning, greedily and positively, on her death. Fanny seemed certain, absurd as it sounded, that she was going to outlive Miss Todd by an indefinite number of years and enjoy Miss Todd's money. Why should she? If she's spoiled my life, mused Miss Todd, I'll see that she doesn't benefit after I'm gone. How horrified Mr. Massey would have been! He approved of my will and I'm not going to alter it to please or enrich Fanny. She's dreadful. To expect to be left the house and everything—*everything* for her life. I won't do it. She can't make me.

Miss Todd looked up and met Fanny Anderson's eyes. The old paralysis of will and power, like a rabbit confronted by a rattlesnake, chilled her again. Fanny was so ruthless, so menacing, so indomitable that sooner or later, in big matters or small, she wore down Miss Todd's flimsy resistance and secured her own way. Not always, though. Miss Todd had never discharged Grier and she had set her face against the installation of central heating. These might be unimportant things, but they gave her a wan satisfaction when she thought of either. Fanny was not invariably invincible. Had Miss Todd the strength, the moral fibre, the courage to withstand her over this far more momentous issue?

"I think I'll go up to my room and have a rest before dinner," she announced.

"Very well, dearest Emily. And afterwards——"

Miss Todd stood rigid in the middle of the floor. "What about afterwards? There's nobody coming in, is there?"

"No; but in case someone should I'll tell Elisabeth we're not at home."

"Oh, don't do that. I like seeing people."

"I want a talk with you."

"What about?"

"I'll explain later."

"It's too hot to talk business, Fanny. I suppose it's business?"

"Yes, dear."

Business. Wills. Money. Legacies. I'm going to get your money. You fool, do you think you can defy me over this?

Miss Todd read all these things in Fanny's eyes.

"If—if it's what we were discussing this afternoon, I consider that the subject's closed. There's nothing more to say."

"Not now; but after dinner will be a good time."

"Fanny, we needn't go into all that again. You heard what I said. My will is made and it's not going to be altered."

"Run away and have a good rest, Emily. It'll be cooler later on and we can talk when you're more reasonable."

"Reasonable! It's intolerable that you should bully me like this."

"Don't excite yourself, please. It's so bad for your heart."

"My heart! My heart! I shouldn't have thought I had one only that you're always harping on it."

"I'm simply anxious that you shouldn't lose your temper and make yourself ill."

Miss Todd gulped and clenched her hands.

"Do you mind moving out of the light? I can't see to finish this last column with you between me and the window."

Fanny's voice was icily polite.

"You want stronger glasses, I expect."

"No, dear. My sight's excellent, I'm thankful to say."

Miss Todd went out of the room. Of course Fanny's sight was excellent, in fact physically and mentally, except for her deafness, Fanny Anderson was in a remarkably good state of preservation. No wonder that she confidently anticipated outliving Miss Todd. Well, she might do so, but her remaining years should not be spent in the affluence she had enjoyed for the last thirty. At Miss Todd's demise Fanny must leave the Croft. Her savings ought to suffice to maintain her in reasonable comfort. Of course she would not like it, but it was in a way her own fault. If she had not been so greedy, so acquisitive, so grasping in her demands Miss Todd might have contemplated leaving her a lump sum, a few hundreds to spend as she pleased, but Fanny wanted more. She wanted the whole. Then she should not get it. The will made so long ago had never been altered and need not be now. If Fanny tried to reopen the subject after dinner Miss Todd would repulse her, politely yet firmly. She must decline to discuss the matter. Fanny knew her dispositions and after Miss Todd's death would have no reason to feel aggrieved or disappointed.

They sat down to dinner, a thin old lady in black lace and a stout old lady in prune velvet. The table was decorated with pinks in a green bowl. Sarah was a tolerable cook, but Miss Todd often sighed for Mrs. Crabbie's cunning touch over a dish and the noiseless, efficient service of Taylor and Rose. Elisabeth breathed through her mouth, set down plates carelessly, kept the pair waiting between courses, and answered back when Fanny found fault with the rissoles. It was still very hot. Miss Todd had little appetite, though she sometimes wondered whether the Day of Judgment would affect Fanny's.

The rice shape and stewed prunes duly appeared, but Elisabeth, with ill-concealed triumph, placed a gooseberry tart before Miss Todd. She was still permitted to sit at the head of her own table and carve, though this, she felt convinced, was because Fanny liked to have each plateful hot to eat at her leisure, and not to be distracted from her meals by the necessity to supply her friend. Miss Todd made a careful incision in the pastry.

"Gooseberry tart, Fanny, or prunes and mould?" she inquired.

"I think as it's there, dearest Emily, that I might have tart. You won't venture on it, surely?"

"Of course I will." Miss Todd felt reckless. If she could defy Fanny in a minor matter such as ordering and eating gooseberry tart against Fanny's wishes or approval she might be able to stand up to her in the much more important one of refusing to alter her will.

"Oh! Do you think it's wise?"

"Why not?"

"They don't agree with you, either pastry or gooseberries."

Elisabeth struck in familiarly: "They won't hurt her, ma'am. Put a drop of cream on. I expect the gooseberries'll be pretty sour."

"The cream's turned. How nasty! Tell Sarah to make some custard, Elisabeth," Fanny ordered.

"I don't think there's enough milk, ma'am."

"We don't want custard. It's very nice without," Miss Todd protested.

"Well, dearest Emily, I hope you won't be sorry you ate it. You oughtn't to eat anything that gives you those attacks of indigestion. They're very bad for your heart."

"I know, Fanny."

"But I might as well talk to the wall."

Fanny's attitude was that of a well-meaning martyr who had to deal with someone hopelessly obstinate and ungrateful.

The evening was close and still. No air stirred the dark, motionless trees in the garden. The windows were open, but the atmosphere, sultry, heavy, presaging thunder, had something menacing in its silence and oppressiveness. Miss Todd murmured to Elisabeth that they would like coffee in the drawing-room and waited for Fanny to accompany her. In the hall Fanny paused.

"Let's go into the library. It might be cooler there."

"I don't think so. It's too near the kitchen, just overhead."

"Come alone," Fanny urged.

She spoke in her ordinary voice, even smiling a little, but Miss Todd felt powerless to withstand her. Very slowly she went towards the library, Fanny at her heels. To see that I don't escape, thought Miss Todd, with a little spasm of terror. The room was seldom used by either. It felt stuffy, unfriendly, dark. Fanny sat down in a large arm-chair and indicated that Miss Todd might do the same.

"I don't want coffee. Do you?" she asked.

"Oh, Fanny, why didn't you say so in the dining-room? Sarah will have made it."

"Does that matter?"

"Only if I'd countermanded it you'd have said it was wasteful."

"It's your coffee."

"I know."

"Well, I'll just tell Elisabeth neither of us cares about it. Then we can start our little talk right away."

"It's far too hot to talk. Besides, I want to finish that book Mrs. Chattervole lent me. I ought to post it back to her to-morrow."

"There's no hurry. Oh, Elisabeth, I rang to tell you that we don't require coffee. You needn't bring it."

Elisabeth looked pointedly at Miss Todd. "Do you not wish any, ma'am?"

"Is it—is it ready?"

"Of course, ma'am."

"Well, in that case— Are you sure you won't have yours, Fanny? You might bring mine, please, Elisabeth. I didn't eat very much at dinner."

"I don't blame you." Fanny spoke viciously. "Those rissoles were absolutely uneatable and that tart too sour for words."

"I enjoyed it. And you had two helpings."

"I only hope it doesn't give you indigestion."

"I'm certain it won't."

"I'm not. It always does. That's why I don't order it, though I like gooseberry tart myself."

Fanny looked consciously smug and virtuous.

Miss Todd drank her coffee in silence. The library, she decided, was not a pleasant room. The trees outside seemed to cast a greenish shade which made everything, the furniture, the pictures, the books, her face and Fanny's, take on the same hue. The hot, still heaviness hung like a pall. Her coffee-cup made a little clatter as she set it down which startled her by its noise.

"Finished?" Fanny demanded affably.

"Yes, thank you."

"Then we can have our talk."

Miss Todd made no answer.

"Emily?"

"Well?"

Fanny edged her chair an inch or two nearer.

"Have you thought over what we were discussing this afternoon?"

"There was no necessity to."

"But, Emily—— I don't think you quite realize my position in the event of your death."

"I'm not dead yet," snapped Miss Todd.

"No, no, dearest. I hope we'll have a few more years together. But you are pretty old, and so am I, and it's best not to leave things unsettled."

"If you mean my money affairs, Fanny, they are perfectly in order. My will is made and I have no intention of altering it."

"I think you ought to alter it."

"I don't agree with you. Why should I?"

"Because your original will, made over thirty years ago, isn't fair to me."

"I can't see that, Fanny. When I made it I didn't even know that you existed."

"Yes, dear, but after we met and became such friends, surely that changed the position?"

"Not very much. You must forgive me for reminding you that for thirty years you've had a most comfortable home. It isn't as though I'd never done anything for you, you know."

"But that's just it." Fanny's voice was shrilly protesting. "When you die my home goes. I'll have to turn out of the Croft and where can I go?"

"Surely you can afford a small house?"

"A small house! After the Croft! Really, Emily!"

Fanny's sarcasm lashed Miss Todd. She winced visibly.

"I know it would be a great change, but, as I said before, unless I left you everything you wouldn't be able to keep up the Croft."

"Then leave me everything," ordered Fanny Anderson.

She had said it at last, made flesh and blood the vague thing harboured in her mind for so long. Miss Todd shook her head.

"No," she whimpered. "No, Fanny, no."

"It isn't any use your saying 'No, Fanny'. You've got to do it."

Miss Todd's breath came hard. Her heart thumped and seemed to be about to leap from her body. Perhaps she ought not to have eaten gooseberry tart. Of course it was only indigestion, but when Fanny menaced her like this she often wondered whether she were going to die of sheer terror. Perhaps Fanny wanted her to die. Yes, no doubt she did, but not before Miss Todd had done as Fanny wished in the matter of a will. When she had, Miss Todd could not die too soon for Fanny Anderson.

She looked over at her. How absurd, how fantastic the position was!

What did she see? A fat little old woman in an unbecoming shade of prune. Why should she fear her? Fanny could not do her any harm until——

Until Miss Todd made a new will in Fanny's favour. Then—— Her hands grew cold and her brow damp as she realized how this would place her hopelessly at Fanny's mercy. Fanny would grow impatient of Miss Todd's longevity. She would grudge her her remaining span. Ere long, in her warped, malignant, envious mind she would come to regard Miss Todd's money, Miss Todd's house as rightfully hers. She would want Miss Todd to die in order that she should enjoy these.

If Miss Todd signed such a will she might as well sign her own death-warrant. . . .

"I—I won't," she stuttered.

"I never thought you'd be so unreasonable or so mean, Emily. You can't take the money with you."

"No, but, Fanny—— It would be unfair to you. I'd—I'd feel that I was keeping you out of it. You'd"—Miss Todd gulped—"want me to die."

"Dearest Emily, what a terrible idea!"

"No, it isn't. It's quite natural. You would, you know."

"Nonsense! I never, never should."

Fanny's emphasis sounded a trifle overdone.

"It's only natural if you did, Fanny. You'd think—and I couldn't blame you—"There's that tiresome Emily. If only she were out of the way I'd enjoy all this—the house, the money'. Now, wouldn't you?"

Fanny shook her head vehemently.

"I'm certain I'd never be so wicked or so ungrateful. Only—only—— I must say, Emily, I'm bitterly hurt and surprised."

"Hurt? Surprised? Why should you be? I've told you how you'd feel if I made a will in your favour, and I said I shouldn't blame you for wishing me dead."

In the hot room the harsh, inevitable word caused a breath of chill.

"I didn't mean that. What I meant was that I'm hurt and surprised by your utter, complete, callous disregard of my future."

Fanny folded her plump little hands, adorned with the rings Miss Todd had given her from time to time, in her prune lap.

"How have I disregarded it?"

"Emily! You've just said you haven't left me a penny. Doesn't that show that you don't care whether I starve after—after your death?"

"Why should you starve? You know you've had hardly any expenses, Fanny. I gave you an excellent salary for being my companion and another for doing the housekeeping. Of course I thought out of those you'd put by every year and have at least a—a"—Miss Todd sought wildly for a word she remembered Mr. Massey once using in connection with some old pensioner of Papa's—"a competence."

"A competence!" Fanny's scorn was truly terrible. "After this!"

"Well, would there be such a tremendous difference?"

"No, of course not. At least I suppose you haven't imagination enough to see any between a cheap boarding-house or a bed-sitting-room, at the mercy of a landlady, instead of the Croft."

Again Fanny's sarcasm shrivelled Miss Todd. Weakly she murmured that she had not meant that.

"What else did you mean, then? One or other is all I should be able to afford."

"You've no idea how your money—what you've saved—would work out. I think you ought to be perfectly comfortable, Fanny, and—and it might not be very long, you know."

"Now you're doing what you just accused me of—wishing me dead."

For a second Miss Todd dallied with the temptation to tell Fanny that, as usual, she was right. Miss Todd did wish her dead. How much pleasanter, how infinitely easier it would make everything if Fanny died first!

"I'm not dead," Fanny stated deliberately.

"No, dear, of course not. But—— You mustn't mind my reminding you. Neither am I."

"You're old and your heart's weak. It's most unlikely that you'd survive me. I think it's only fair and just, Emily—just to me, I mean—that you realize the almost certainty of your going first and act accordingly."

"I don't agree, Fanny; but if you consider yourself in any way badly used—I do not—I might add a codicil, leaving you a lump sum."

"That's not nearly enough."

"I think it's plenty. You could spend it bit by bit and it would easily last your lifetime. It mightn't be worth while to invest it."

"A few hundreds? No, it would not."

"Fanny, aren't you being rather unreasonable? Why should I leave you any money? We're not related to one another. We're only"—Miss Todd gulped—"friends."

"For thirty years," Fanny reminded Miss Todd gently.

"Yes. And that's another thing. Ours isn't like a friendship that's lasted all our lives, beginning when we were children. You and I were both middle-aged when we met."

"Even so, I've been your closest friend, dearest Emily, and I consider that if I'm no relation I've every bit as good a claim to be remembered in your will as those other people you've left legacies to."

"If I leave you something, the same as I've left to each of them, won't that satisfy you?"

"No. I ought to have everything for my lifetime. I don't mind who gets it after my death."

Miss Todd was more or less accustomed to Fanny's colossal effrontery, but this instance of it left her gasping.

"You don't mind who gets my money after neither of us can spend it?"

"Exactly. That's just the point. You can't spend it when you're dead and neither can I, but I ought to enjoy the same comfort for my last few years, and I'm astonished that you need to have this pointed out so plainly, Emily."

As usual Miss Todd was in the wrong and Fanny detestably and incontestably right. At least she thought that she was, which, throughout her entire intercourse with Miss Todd, had amounted to the same thing.

Miss Todd clutched at the skirts of her vanishing courage. Fanny's attitude was too absurd.

"Well, I'm sorry, Fanny, but I don't think any good can come of our prolonging this discussion. I've already told you that I have no intention of altering my will."

"You must, Emily."

"No. No."

Fanny had risen. Miss Todd told herself that it was ridiculous to be afraid. How could Fanny harm her? She was nothing but a fat, partially deaf old woman with a bad temper.

"Please sit down, or why shouldn't we go back to the drawing-room? It's so close in here."

"You're not going back to the drawing-room until you've agreed to do what I want."

"Fanny, please leave me alone. I shan't alter my will."

"You must, Emily. Now, first thing in the morning you'll ring up Palliser and Hickman, your solicitors, and tell them to send somebody to take your instructions for a new will."

The library was hot, dark, airless. The heavy trees seemed to press up against the windows, narrowing the room to a greenish tent in which nothing stayed sane or stable. Fanny's face was close to Miss Todd's, menace in her look. Her fat little hands gripped Miss Todd's thin shoulders.

"You must and shall, Emily."

"Oh! Oh!"

"I believe you're one of those silly, superstitious people who think that making a will attracts death."

"I made my will over thirty years ago and I shall not make another."

"Oh, yes, you will."

Miss Todd dreaded Fanny more when she was quiet and determined than when she stormed or lost her temper. She wrenched herself free.

"Do stop worrying me. It's really very tiresome of you, Fanny. I don't know what has started you talking to me like this about my money affairs. You never did until quite recently."

"Because it never crossed my mind that your will was an old one and that you had left me nothing."

"Please sit down. I can't think with you hovering over me."

"I'll sit down in a minute, as soon as you promise to do as I want."

"I might ring up the solicitors about a codicil. If I leave you a thousand pounds, Fanny, I consider that that would be ample, and it's only in order that you mayn't have any grounds for considering yourself badly treated."

"A thousand pounds is not nearly enough."

"You could spend it at the rate of a hundred a year for ten years. You're hardly likely to survive me as long as ten years. You mayn't survive me at all. You might never get it."

"I don't want it. I want what I feel I've earned and deserve—this house and the money to keep it up. If, as you've just reminded me so tactlessly and unkindly, I don't live long after you, all those greedy charities and legatees won't have to wait indefinitely."

"They ought not to have to wait at all. Once I'm dead——"

"I should have the Croft and the rest of your estate."

Miss Todd gulped. Fanny had not sat down, but she was now standing a few yards away, which made Miss Todd braver.

"I cannot see that, Fanny."

"It isn't as though I were a young woman, Emily. Let me have a little peace and comfort for a few more years."

"You can have both with a thousand pounds added to your savings."

"Not like this."

"It would mean two sets of death-duties within a comparatively short time."

"Well, that doesn't matter."

"It cripples the estate badly."

"But it's not like the money and everything going altogether to one person, Emily. What does it matter if charities or the other people you've divided it amongst lose something?"

"I don't want them to."

"Well, will you leave the personal legacies as they stand and will the rest to me? I'm quite agreeable, if you consider that fairer."

"Oh, but——"

"How much have you left individually? I don't mean to charities. Tell me about the other legacies."

Very reluctantly Miss Todd mentioned the amounts bequeathed to old friends such as the Karslakes' son and Mrs. Lawley's grand-children. Fanny raised her eyebrows.

"Far too much in every case, Emily."

"It isn't. There are four of the Egertons, two clergymen, and one of the girls is teaching and the other is a missionary. A little extra income like this will be a boon. And Bobby Karslake's very clever. He might be able to specialize if he had something behind him."

"You paid for his education and he ought to have married money. You always said his wife hadn't a penny."

"It was a love-match and Lilius is charming. I was delighted about it. And if I helped to educate Bobby that was my own business. He was only just ten when Dr. Karslake died and left poor Sybil very badly off."

"It's extraordinary how you can sympathize with her and won't see how poor I shall be," whined Fanny. "That artful, designing woman got round you very cleverly. I saw through her directly. No doubt she expects her son to be your heir."

"Sybil knows how much I have left to Bobby and she was perfectly satisfied."

"So she ought to be. Why should he get anything at your death after all you did for him earlier?"

"Because I wish to leave him some money, Fanny, and I often think it's rather hard on him and the Egertons to have to wait indefinitely for it."

Miss Todd's tone was cool, dignified. Fanny moved her ground.

"Have you left the servants anything?"

"Not the present ones. They're always changing. If Timmins and Mrs. Crabbie and the others who were here when Papa was alive had stayed probably I should have remembered them." Miss Todd sighed. "I gave Smithson an annuity when he retired, and there's only Grier."

Miss Todd stopped and bit her lip. What possessed her to mention Grier's name? Of course Fanny would pounce on it directly. She did.

"Grier? You don't mean to say, Emily, that you've left that abominable, dishonest, ill-mannered old man one farthing?"

"It's really nobody's business but mine and Grier's, Fanny. Naturally I am not going to allow a faithful old servant like Grier to go to the workhouse."

"How much have you left him?"

Fanny was breathing hard. Her face was mottled. If she did not take care she would certainly have a stroke.

"It's nothing to do with you."

"Yes, it is. I call it disgraceful of you, Emily, remembering Grier in your will, leaving him money, providing for him, and all the time you were willing that I—I, your dearest friend—should get nothing, starve, be turned out by these other people who've got round you, die in a ditch—— Oh!"

"Please don't talk such nonsense, Fanny. As I said, there's no question of the workhouse or starvation in your case. You'll have plenty, particularly if I leave you this thousand pounds."

"How much have you left Grier?"

"I left his mother the use of the lodge, rent free, for her lifetime, and at her death the same arrangement to hold good with Grier. She died about twenty-five years ago, as you'll remember, and he's had it since and will continue to have it as long as he lives."

"Only the lodge? No money?"

"A small amount. He hasn't been able to put by much more than will keep him going."

"He's had good wages and you know you overpay him absurdly for the stuff he says he grows himself and sells to you." Fanny was sneering and sarcastic, a mood Miss Todd loathed. "I wonder you don't suggest he might have saved, the way you thought I should have."

"The cases are not parallel at all."

"No, indeed they are not. I'm to be turned adrift at your death, and Grier is to enjoy the use of the lodge *and* a legacy. Oh, I see. Very generous of you, Emily, and very tactful to consider your gardener before your oldest friend."

Poor Miss Todd, battered, bewildered, bemused by Fanny's angrily-expressed arguments, her stinging sarcasms, her changes of temper, her wrath and reproaches, began, as she always did during a scene with Fanny, to feel that she would pay any price to silence her. After all, Fanny was old. She might find life in a new place, under a strange roof, uncongenial and distasteful. For a few years, possibly less, she ought to have the right to remain at the Croft. The other beneficiaries could have their money free of legacy duty, or if Miss Todd left less to the charities—— They were cold, impersonal bequests. Perhaps Fanny might die first, rendering any will made in her favour null and void.

Miss Todd hesitated painfully. Fanny saw the hesitation and took full advantage of it.

"Do think things over, dearest Emily, and leave me what's only just. If you ring up in the morning they can send in the afternoon and you can arrange it all easily."

"Yes, Fanny."

"And now let's go back to the drawing-room, shall we?"

They went back. Miss Todd felt limp and sick. Fanny was going to get her way. She always did. . . .

All night Miss Todd tossed and worried, staring into the close darkness with hunted eyes. If she made a new will in Fanny's favour Fanny would wish her dead, might—Miss Todd's body shook and shivered—bring about her death. She did not want to die. Much less did she want to die to enrich Fanny Anderson.

At breakfast Fanny was quiet and agreeable. Afterwards, as the two were rising from the table, she spoke pleasantly.

"Wouldn't now be a good time to telephone, dearest Emily?"

Suddenly Miss Todd felt all support drifting away from her. Soon the waters would meet over her head. . . .

"You do it, please, Fanny."

It gave her a faint, malicious satisfaction to suggest this. Fanny never would admit to her deafness, but because of it she hated using the telephone, though always the blame for her inability to hear the person at the other end was placed on his or her shoulders. People wouldn't speak up. They yelled or they mumbled. She had been perfectly distinct.

"Do you really wish me to?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What am I to say?"

"Anything you please."

"Shall I ask for someone special? Mr. Palliser? He generally does your business, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

Fanny left the library door open. Miss Todd, loitering aimlessly about the hall, heard Fanny's side of the conversation plainly.

"Is that Palliser and Hickman? What? Is it? Well, why couldn't you say so? I can't hear you. Please speak slowly. What? I'm speaking for Miss Todd, the Croft, Little Batnors. No; not Miss Dodds. Miss Todd. T.O.D.D. MISS TODD. It's no use. I'm shouting myself hoarse, but if you don't choose to listen— Yes, that's right. She wants Mr. Palliser to come over and see her. I don't know. She didn't say. Hold the line a minute and I'll ask her. Emily!"

"Yes?"

"That's a clerk or something. He wants to know do you want Mr. Palliser particularly?"

"I'd prefer him, of course."

"Very well. Hello! Miss Todd says she prefers Mr. Palliser. What? Oh, but that's most inconvenient. No; she can't put it off. It's something which ought to be done immediately. This afternoon? I'll ask. Emily, Mr. Palliser could come this afternoon. Making such a compliment of doing what he's paid for!"

"Very well. Say, please, Fanny, that I shall be much obliged if he will do so. Ask him if half-past two would suit him."

"That will interfere with your afternoon rest."

"It doesn't matter."

What did missing her afternoon rest—an innovation of some twenty years' standing, instituted and insisted upon by Fanny—matter? What did anything matter except the stark, irrefutable fact that as soon as her signature was dry on the paper containing her new will Miss Todd's days would be numbered? She knew it perfectly. The worst of it was that she was no more capable of defying Fanny in the matter than she had been able to rid herself of Fanny thirty years ago.

Again and again the grotesque absurdity of the position and her sheer inability to withstand Fanny made her furious with herself. Her own weakness had burdened her with Fanny for thirty years, but that that same weakness should continue to have consequences after she and Fanny were done with one another was grievously wrong. If she could not stand up for herself, she ought not to allow Fanny to rob others of the benefits she

intended them to enjoy. Bobby Karslake, the Egertons, none of whom were getting any younger, must wait indefinitely for her death, and not hers only. Fanny might outlive her for years, keeping these people, so much more deserving, out of their due. And poor old Grier? Unless she insisted on Grier's legacy remaining unaltered Fanny would not hesitate to turn the old man from the lodge directly the power to do so passed into her grasping hands. No; Miss Todd might yield to her in every other respect, but she must safeguard Grier's last days.

Fanny watched her all the morning. At lunch she watched her. After lunch, as they sat in the library, again airless, lifeless, hemmed in by heavy trees, she continued to watch Miss Todd. She had said very little. The subject of the approaching interview with Mr. Palliser had not again been mentioned between them. Miss Todd felt exhausted, breathless, as though she had been running. Of course Fanny would get up and go away directly Mr. Palliser arrived, and alone with him it might be easier for Miss Todd to consult him after a fashion. He was alas! not Mr. Massey, but if he would advise her, support her. . . .

"Mr. Palliser, ma'am."

"Oh, yes, Elisabeth, thank you. Where is he?"

"I put him in the drawing-room, ma'am."

"I told you to show him straight in here," Fanny informed the maid.

"Shall I, ma'am?" Elisabeth asked Miss Todd.

"I—I think so. It's more business-like in the library, isn't it, Fanny?"

"Yes, dearest Emily."

Elisabeth opened the door, muttered something, and retreated. Mr. Palliser came in. He was tall and lean and hatchet-faced, dressed precisely, and carried a small case. Miss Todd greeted him limply. Fanny and he shook hands. Miss Todd waited.

"And now, about business." Mr. Palliser consulted his watch. "Yes, I can spare half an hour. What did you wish to see me about, my dear Miss Todd?"

Miss Todd looked at Fanny.

"Don't you think, dear, that Mr. Palliser and I would be better to arrange things by ourselves?" she suggested nervously.

"I beg your pardon, Emily? Of course I'll stop."

Fanny had deliberately misunderstood, using her deafness as a convenience. She sat down again. Miss Todd trembled. How could she request Fanny to go away when she was so obviously determined to remain, to be present throughout the interview, to settle everything as she wished? Mr. Palliser would not realize the situation in the least. Directly he heard that Miss Todd was intending to make a new will, bequeathing her entire estate to Fanny Anderson, he might even consider it suitable, desirable, and necessary for Fanny to be in the room.

Miss Todd said faintly: "It's about my will, Mr. Palliser."

"Ah, yes."

"I think—— That is, Miss Anderson—— I—I want to provide for her. A—a new will."

"Miss Anderson is not, then, a beneficiary under your existing will, Miss Todd? We hold it, but I cannot say that I am acquainted with the contents."

"No. It was made many years ago, before—before we met. I thought—I wish everything to go to her for her lifetime."

"I understand. And afterwards?"

"Oh, the same as my present will, please. Charities, and—and a few personal legacies. There's my old gardener——"

Fanny moved abruptly. In a low, toneless voice she said: "I think you'd better leave that out, Emily."

"I won't."

Mr. Palliser, slightly puzzled, looked from one to the other through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Dearest Emily, Grier doesn't require or deserve your generosity. I don't suppose you will know about it, Mr. Palliser, but Grier is totally unworthy. I found him out in gross dishonesty years ago, but Miss Todd refused to dismiss him, and he has sponged on her ever since."

"Indeed? Most regrettable! Then do you wish this man Grier remembered, Miss Todd, or are your present dispositions in his favour to be altered?"

"I—— I——"

Miss Todd's brain worked rapidly. She could give Grier a sum of money at once with which to buy himself a cottage in the village. After she was gone he might not care to remain in the lodge with Fanny reigning at the Croft. It would be better to provide for him now, and of course he would stay in his present quarters as long as she was alive. *How long would that be?* Her palms grew icy. Why was Fanny looking at her so fixedly? Vaguely she grew aware of Mr. Palliser's voice.

"... draw up a will in these terms and bring it over for your signature. I and my clerk can witness it."

"Thank you."

"Would to-morrow morning at ten-thirty be a convenient time?"

"Quite, thank you."

Any time was convenient for signing one's death-warrant.

"And Miss Anderson's Christian names?"

"I—I don't know." Miss Todd gave a feeble, half-hysterical little laugh at which she could see Mr. Palliser raising pained, surprised eyebrows. "That is, I don't remember, if—if I ever heard."

She and Fanny had lived together in the same house for thirty years and she knew neither Fanny's Christian names nor her age. It was really amusing.

"What are your full names, Miss Anderson?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I asked you to give me your Christian names in full."

"Oh! Frances Caroline Anderson."

"Thank you."

(The undertaker had inquired Fanny's names when arranging to send her obituary notice to *The Times*. How fortunate that Miss Todd had learned so recently what these were! She had had 'Fanny' added in brackets. The notice read well. It had been inserted twice.) . . .

Mr. Palliser had gone. Miss Todd supposed that she had shaken hands with him, thanked him for coming, and rung for Elisabeth to show him out, but the close of the interview was blurred, unreal. She looked at Fanny after the hall-door had shut. Surely Fanny would have the bare decency to thank her?

"That's all right," Fanny announced cheerfully. "And now we'll both have our port, shall we?"

Not one word, one syllable of gratitude, appreciation, or affection. Miss Todd had just arranged to endow Fanny Anderson with all her worldly goods at her own death, and Fanny was not even prepared to say Thank you. More, she had succeeded in stripping Grier of the modest provision prepared for him. This last was unforgivable.

How soon would Fanny strike and with what means? She would not do it at once. Oh, no! Fanny was very clever, too clever for that. If Miss Todd died suddenly almost immediately after she had made a will in Fanny's favour it might look odd and draw suspicion upon Fanny. No; she would wait, plan, and finally act. Yet she could not afford to wait long. She was old too, and her enjoyment of the money might not last many years.

Elisabeth brought in the accustomed little tray with the decanter, the two glasses, the plate of biscuits. As a matter of course she set it down before Fanny and Fanny poured out the wine. They were both in the drawing-room, although Miss Todd had not the slightest recollection of how she and Fanny came to be there. She looked at Fanny. A fat, rather common little woman. That was all Fanny was. How absurd to be afraid of her, to cringe to her, to obey her so slavishly!

Miss Todd had always feared Fanny Anderson. She feared her sarcasms, her easy contempt, her open regard of Miss Todd as a poor malleable fool (that she was and knew that she was did not make it any pleasanter to have that fact repeatedly pointed out by Fanny Anderson), but now her fear took a different and far more concrete shape. Fanny meant her harm. Miss Todd felt convinced of this. She would steal her life and enjoy her money.

The will was not signed. If it were not, Miss Todd might go on living. Fanny had too great a respect for the goose which laid the golden eggs to kill it. Only when its death meant that the golden eggs became Fanny's was Miss Todd in danger. Dared she delay, temporize, put off Mr. Palliser, assure him that there was no hurry?

All through the rest of the day she wavered and hesitated, at one moment trying to force herself to steal into the library and ring up, cancelling the morrow's appointment, the next telling herself that it was no use evading the issue. Sooner or later Fanny would have her way. Until that will was signed Miss Todd would know no peace. It had gone on for so long now, Fanny's hints and queries and suggestions and finally her bold demands, that in a sense it might be a relief to be done with these. Once she had secured what she had been aiming for Miss Todd might know a little rest. Surely Fanny must cease to torment her?

The day ended without Miss Todd taking any steps. At night she lay awake, wondering feverishly what Fanny was planning. The morning was like its predecessor, hot, stark, windless, sallow. At breakfast Miss Todd felt so ill that she wondered whether she would survive to sign the document. Fanny was bright and chatty and affectionate. She ate heartily and seemed concerned by Miss Todd's loss of appetite.

"You aren't worrying over Mr. Palliser's visit, are you, dearest Emily?"

"Oh, no."

"He won't keep you more than a very few minutes, I expect."

"No."

"How discourteous lawyers are! He made quite a compliment of coming yesterday."

"I suppose he thought I ought to have gone to the office."

"It was much nicer to settle everything in your own house."

Of course it was nicer for Fanny because she could be present.

Mr. Palliser arrived punctually. He brought the newly-drawn-up will with him and duly presented it for Miss Todd's inspection and approval. The various involved clauses danced before her eyes. Everything of which she died possessed she bequeathed for her lifetime to Frances Caroline Anderson, and at the death of the said Frances Caroline Anderson to the following. They were all there: the charities, the personal legacies, the familiar names. Only Grier's was missing. Grier——

"I trust that you find everything satisfactory and in order, Miss Todd?" Mr. Palliser inquired gravely.

"Yes, thank you. Shall I sign it now?"

"If you will, after I have called in my clerk to be the second witness."

The clerk was young, assured, well-mannered. Miss Todd wrote her signature—Emily Letitia Todd—and he and Mr. Palliser added theirs. Fanny sat by. She did not obtrude herself in any way, but she was there. Miss Todd shuddered violently.

"Surely you do not feel cold this oppressive morning?" Mr. Palliser demanded solicitously.

"Oh, no, thank you. It was only"—Miss Todd checked a strong inclination to break into hysterical laughter—"only a goose walking over my grave."

A goose walking over her grave. She was the goose—the goose which laid the golden eggs—and very soon she would be in her grave. Fanny would see to that.

Mr. Palliser bestowed the will in his case, shook hands, and took his departure. Again Fanny uttered no word of thanks. Miss Todd felt afraid and lonely. After all these years, after all she had done for Fanny, surely Fanny might have a little affection for her instead of regarding her as a tiresome obstacle to Fanny's inheritance? She was seventy-eight, a solitary, unwanted old woman. Since Papa died and Mr. Massey nobody had needed her or cared for her for herself. None would regret her. Fanny would gloat and the other people whom her will benefited would be angered and disappointed because she had arranged that Fanny's life intervened between them and the immediate possession of their legacies. This was all the feeling her death would arouse. Her death. . . .

Furtively, under her eyelids, she scrutinized Fanny. Fanny was fat and growing deaf, but she had made sure of Miss Todd's money. When? How long or how soon? By what means?

Here was Elisabeth with the inevitable port. Did she know or suspect why Mr. Palliser had paid a visit to the Croft on two consecutive days? Was she disappointed that Miss Todd had made no reference to leaving her anything? She had been with her for nearly eighteen months, a record for these days. Ought she to be remembered? Fanny would not allow it. It was no use Miss Todd suggesting it. She might leave a paper directing that Sarah and Elisabeth were both to be given a sum of money. Was that legal, binding, without witnesses? Would Fanny, rummaging through Miss

Todd's repositories, find and ignore it? She was so tired, too tired to think coherently. . . .

"Here's your port, dearest Emily, just at the right time. I'm sure you need it," Fanny was saying.

Her port. Fanny always poured out Miss Todd's glassful and then her own. How easy to put something—something fatal—into the one glass! Her throat refused its office. She set down the glass untasted.

"I don't want it, Fanny."

"Nonsense, Emily! Drink it at once. It'll do you good. You had a poor breakfast and then this business with Mr. Palliser."

"I'd—rather not."

Fanny looked at Miss Todd. Very slowly, her hand shaking, Miss Todd lifted the glass and swallowed the contents.

How long did poison take to act? At intervals all day Miss Todd expected symptoms to manifest themselves, but to her mingled surprise and relief nothing happened. Fanny was precisely as usual. They sat in the garden for the greater part of the afternoon and evening. At night they parted outside Miss Todd's room with the accustomed kiss given and received every night for thirty years.

After she was in bed Miss Todd crept out and turned the key in her door.

How would Fanny kill her? She knew herself doomed. For years now Fanny had dwelled so constantly on Miss Todd's weak heart that by this time Miss Todd felt convinced that she had something seriously wrong with it. What would be easier than for Fanny to frighten or startle her in some way and bring on a heart-attack which would prove fatal? Or she might thrust at her from behind as they were coming downstairs. Nowhere, at any time, was she safe. There were so many ways by which Fanny—clever Fanny—could compass her death. Nobody would suspect. Everybody in Little Batnors knew that Miss Todd suffered from her heart. It would look, however it came about, like a natural death.

To-morrow she must see Grier, arrange with him for his future. She had written the cheque. Fanny would have to be circumvented somehow. What was that? Miss Todd sat upright in bed, her body damp, her heart pounding. Had it been imagination, sharpened by fear, or did she hear a stealthy step outside and a hand trying the door-handle? If Fanny came into her room she would die.

That was precisely what Fanny wanted. She must not come in. Miss Todd's eyes filled with tears. She had done no harm to anybody. She had been a good daughter, a good employer, a good citizen, a good friend, but Fanny was planning to destroy her because she stood in her way and Fanny wanted Miss Todd's money. In a measure it hurt more than anything that Fanny should have so little affection to give her after all these years.

I was kind to her, Miss Todd mused rebelliously. If I hadn't provided her with a home and a good salary—two salaries—she would have had to go as companion to some old lady where she wouldn't have been nearly so comfortable and been obliged to work. She's done nothing here. Fanny enjoys housekeeping and bullying servants. That's what she is—a born bully. She's taken everything from me: all my old friends, my good maids, and now she wants my money. It's not fair.

Your money or your life. Wasn't that what a highwayman used to say?

But Fanny wanted Miss Todd's money *and* her life. Nothing less than Miss Todd's death would satisfy her.

Miss Todd dozed fitfully, finally slept more soundly, and woke to another burning day. If it would rain, if the atmosphere would soften, she might gather a little courage, but this dry, sunless, enervating heat sapped her physical strength as much as Fanny drained her will-power. Despite her stoutness Fanny seemed to thrive in such weather. Of course, Miss Todd decided sourly, as she studied Fanny furtively from behind the coffee-pot at breakfast, she'll outlive me in any case. She's perfectly well, only a trifle deaf. . . .

"What do you want to do, dearest Emily?" Fanny inquired. "I suggest a quiet morning in the garden, if we can find a cool spot."

"I have to go down to the village."

"Is that wise in this heat?"

"You needn't come if you don't care to."

"But of course I'm coming."

Of course Fanny was. She did not propose to let Miss Todd out of her sight until she found an opportunity—

The bridge over the stream. It was in a shocking state of disrepair, and had been a bone of contention between the ratepayers of Little Batnors and the county council for many months. What would be easier than for Fanny to give Miss Todd a shove half-way across—there was no hand-rail, only the rotten planking—and let her tumble into the bed below? She would not drown. The water was reduced to a muddy trickle these hot, dry days, but the fall, the shock, the fright would all combine to kill her. Panting, Miss Todd looked at Fanny. She must go to the village by the high-road and return the same way. If Fanny scolded and objected she could not help it. She was not going to cross that bridge.

Once beyond the lodge-gates Miss Todd walked forward determinedly. To all outward appearance she and Fanny presented a perfectly normal aspect, two old ladies, one thin, in a navy marocain coat, the other fat, wearing a patterned foulard dress. They went towards the village, talking trivialities. Who would guess, suspect, or believe, ran Miss Todd's distracted thoughts, that here were a prospective murderess and her destined victim? Everything was so ordinary, so normal, herself, Fanny, that sallow line of ricks outside a farm, the flat, sun-dried fields, the peonies flaunting in a little cottage-garden, the scarlet van from the co-operative stores in Market Batnors, a string of geese waddling across the road. Geese. A golden goose. Golden eggs. . . .

"Where do you want to go, dearest?" Fanny demanded affectionately.

"I must send off this book to Mrs. Chattervole, and get some stamps and a few post cards."

"Well, we'd better take it slowly on the way back. You look quite tired."

"I'm all right, thank you, Fanny."

Fanny solicitous, sympathetic, was even more unbearable than Fanny aggressive and domineering. 'Dearest Emily'! Miss Todd choked. She doesn't care a straw for me. She hates me. She wishes I were dead.

"Let's come home by the short-cut, shall we?" Fanny suggested.

"No. The bridge isn't safe."

"Rubbish!"

"You needn't be rude. Anyway, I'm not going to cross it."

"Then why not take a taxi back? We can get one at the King's Arms."

"I'd rather walk. Oh, there's Mrs. Meredith. I want to ask her about the work-party."

(Little Batnors had been shocked by Fanny's death. Several people who saw her with Miss Todd in the village on the morning of the day that her brief fatal illness commenced had remarked on how well she looked. Mrs. Meredith had told Miss Todd bluntly that she was looking poorly and tired. The heat, no doubt.)

"I can't think why you're so stubborn about the short-cut," Fanny lamented.

"I won't cross the bridge."

"You'll be quite exhausted."

"It doesn't matter. We needn't hurry, and I can rest all the afternoon."

Miss Todd's business at the post office dispatched the two walked home along the hard white road, under a low, rigid sky. The heat was brazen, merciless. When the long wall bordering the Croft gardens and the chimneys of the lodge came in view Miss Todd, grey-lipped, halted and faced Fanny Anderson.

"Fanny, I have to see Grier. I'll go in and sit down for a little. You walk on up to the house if you like."

"What do you want to see Grier about?"

Miss Todd's answer was to sway against her companion. Fanny, apparently alarmed, tugged fiercely at the bell beside the gates. It rang in the lodge. Grier came slouching out.

"Oh, Grier!" moaned Miss Todd.

"Miss Emily, what's the matter?"

"I—I don't know."

Grier took her arm and helped her towards the lodge.

"You come in and sit down, ma'am. It's far too 'ot for you to be walkin'."

"She wouldn't take the short-cut," grumbled Fanny. "No wonder she's tired."

"Well, after she's 'ad a rest she'll just need to drive back," Grier decided. "You trot up to the 'ouse and 'phone for a taxi, Miss Anderson."

"Upon my word!" remonstrated Fanny. "Why can't you go, Grier?"

"I'm stoppin' with Miss Emily. 'Urry up. Take down some o' yer fat," Grier muttered viciously.

Miss Todd, sick and faint, smiled weakly. How Fanny would resent being ordered about by Grier! In a way Grier had no business to do it, but it was clever of him to give her the opportunity of a private conversation.

Mercifully Fanny did not hear Grier's last remark. She walked off, puffing slightly, a stout little body in a foulard Miss Todd had always hated. Her eyes closed. Somehow she found herself inside the lodge, lying back in a deep, shabby chair, surrounded by the familiar furnishings of the old parlour. How she loved every inch of it! Grier kept the place spotless. It was a shame that he should be torn from it. She must put it out of Fanny's power to render him homeless and penniless. . . .

"Grier?"

"Yes, Miss Emily, my dear?"

"Has she—has she gone?"

"Fatty? Yes."

"Oh, Grier, you shouldn't call her that, you know."

"Why not? Gettin' a regular tub she is."

"Grier, I—I wanted to speak to you. We must be quick. How dark it is in here! I'm—frightened."

"It ain't goin' to thunder, ma'am, not for a while yet."

"No. I didn't mean that. It's Fanny—Miss Anderson. Oh, Grier!"

"Tell me, my darling Miss Emily."

His tone was infinitely gentle and soothing. He was leaning over the chair, holding both her limp hands in his gnarled, work-worn ones.

"I—— Oh, Grier! Come quite close. It's Miss Anderson."

"She ain't 'ere. Don't want 'er, do yer?"

"No. No. I must tell you—— Grier, she's got me to make another will—a new one. I've had to leave her everything."

"Right out, Miss Emily?"

"No. For her life only. But—but, Grier, the worst of it is that she's made me alter what I always intended for you."

"That's all right, Miss Emily. I've got a few pounds put by. Don't you fret."

"I meant you to have the lodge. I left you a little income as well in the old will. I had to do it, but she shan't rob you. Give me my hand-bag, please. Oh, where is it? Did I drop it when I nearly fainted outside? Has Fanny taken it?"

"It's 'ere, Miss Emily, 'angin' on the back o' the chair. There you are."

"Open it, please. Give me an envelope. It ought to be in the inner pocket. Oh, can't you find it? Fanny must have taken it. That day in the train when we were coming here—— I always knew she took the money, but I couldn't prove it."

"This wot yer mean, ma'am?"

"Yes. Oh, thank God! Now, Grier, there's a cheque inside, made out to you. Two thousand pounds."

"Miss Emily!"

"You must go into Market Batnors directly I've gone and lodge it. Open an account at the bank there. It shuts at three. Don't waste a minute."

"There's no 'urry, ma'am, and in any case that's far too much. If yer wants to do anything for me a 'undred or two'd be plenty."

"No, it would not. You must invest it, Grier—Mr. Palliser will advise you—and buy a cottage with part of it if Fanny turns you out."

"She'll not do that."

"She would. It's the first thing she'd think of directly I'm dead."

"But you may bury 'er, Miss Emily. Why should you think you'll go first?"

"Because I know I shall. She'll see to that."

Miss Todd was sitting up, her face ghastly, her hands clutching Grier's rough sleeve. The crowded little room was very dark.

"Lor', Miss Emily, you don't believe——"

"She'll kill me," babbled Miss Todd. "Now I've signed that will I'll never have an easy moment. That's why I wouldn't walk back by the short-cut to-day. The bridge—— She'd push me off. Or there's the port wine. I always drink a glass every morning. She could put something in it so easily."

Grier's weather-beaten face had grown a curious shade of grey. His puckered lips emitted a soundless whistle. Miss Todd lay back limply.

"So you see, don't you, Grier, why you must lodge that cheque at once? Directly I'm dead it'll be valueless, waste paper, unless it's paid in whilst I'm alive. Promise you'll go as soon as you can."

"Yes, yes, my dear Miss Emily, yes, yes."

Grier was soothing her, talking to her as though she were a child. Did he understand the urgency, the horror of the situation?

"Promise. When the taxi comes it'll take me up to the house and I'll tell them to come back here for you. You must be ready, Grier. That'll be quicker than the bus. You ought to be in Market Batnors in half an hour. After you've been to the bank go to Palliser and Hickman's office and tell Mr. Palliser about it, and—and, Grier, he's to say nothing to Miss Anderson."

"No, Miss Emily."

"Ring me up from the office or get somebody there to do it. Just say that your business in Market Batnors is satisfactorily done. Even if Miss Anderson takes the message it won't convey much to her."

"She's deaf." Grier snorted contemptuously. "Won't 'ear 'alf."

"I daren't let her hear anything." Miss Todd was still white-faced and shaking. "Put the cheque away, Grier. Lock it up."

Grier ambled over to an antique bureau. It was a beautiful piece of furniture, originally a wedding-present to Grier's parents. More than once Miss Todd had noticed Fanny casting covetous eyes upon it. With thankfulness now she saw the cheque safely bestowed in a drawer and the bureau re-locked. Grier came back and stood beside her chair again. With a gentleness a woman might have envied he took her hands and chafed them between his calloused palms. Despite the heat hers felt clammy, damp, lifeless.

"There, there, my dear, there, there," Grier kept saying.

Miss Todd released one hand, pulled off her large mushroom hat, and dropped it to the floor. Her grey head subsided limply against the patchwork antimacassar over the back of the chair.

The darkness seemed to deepen. Everything was blurred, hazy, including the china dogs on the mantelpiece, the old samplers, the crude painting of sheep in an impossibly green meadow, the canisters, the candlesticks. There was a distant rumble of thunder.

"Goin' to rain. That'll make it cooler," Grier muttered.

"Don't leave me."

"No, no."

They were both silent. Miss Todd's eyes closed. She had done what she planned and hoped, safeguarded Grier's future, outwitted Fanny. It might be possible to fall asleep for a little while. Grier would not let Fanny hurt her.

"Wake me up when the taxi comes," she whispered.

"Yes, Miss Emily."

A loud, impatient hammering on the front door of the lodge startled her. Grier murmured a soothing word and went out. Miss Todd heard Fanny's voice and trembled.

"The lower orders are getting simply impossible," Fanny stormed. She puffed her way into the parlour, Grier at her heels. "I rang up the garage, Emily, but the girl was so indistinct that in the end I had to get Elisabeth to try and make out what she was saying. She had the impudence to tell me she couldn't hear what I said."

"Is the taxi coming?" Miss Todd inquired faintly.

"They hadn't one in at the moment. They'd all gone to the flower show at Cross Baskets, but they promised to send one up as soon as it was available."

"Oh! When?"

"She couldn't say. I told Elisabeth to tell her it was urgent. First thing to-morrow I'm going down to complain in person about that girl. If it wasn't so like thunder I'd go this afternoon."

"But they are sending?"

"I suppose so. I've done my best, anyway, and came down again in all this heat to tell you. What would you like to do, Emily? Will you wait for the taxi, or walk up to the house? We can go slowly."

"I think I'll wait, Fanny, thank you, but there's no need for you to."

"I'm not going to trudge the whole way back along the avenue. I'll wait too. I'm in no hurry."

"Yes."

Fanny turned to Grier.

"Are there any cucumbers, Grier? I've ordered salmon for lunch and I want a cucumber."

"Eh, ma'am?"

"I want a cucumber," bellowed Fanny.

"What's she sayin', Miss Emily?"

Wearily Miss Todd roused herself. "Miss Anderson wants a cucumber, I think."

"Wot? To eat now?"

"No, of course not." Fanny, overhearing, spoke angrily. "Show me what you've got."

Alone, Miss Todd could hear the voices of Fanny and Grier raised in an interminable and acrimonious dispute. Fanny seemed to be accusing Grier of malpractices in connection with cucumbers, and Grier was pretending to misunderstand what she said. A few heavy drops of rain fell. Oh, why did the taxi not come?

"You ought to be dismissed!" Miss Todd started nervously as Fanny's strident voice, hurling this point of view at Grier, heralded her return. "All those beautiful cucumbers hidden away and you pretending you hadn't any except what you showed me! You're just keeping them to sell on the sly, the way you've done all along. If Miss Todd wasn't such a fool she'd have got rid of you years ago. When I'm mistress here you'll find things very different."

"Beg yer pardon, ma'am?"

"You've no right here, living rent-free and making a nice purse out of the garden produce. It ought to be stopped."

"'Tain't none o' yer business."

"It'll be my business one day and then you'll see."

Fanny, flushed, panting, came in, carrying two fine cucumbers. Amid a torrent of wrathful explanations from her Miss Todd succeeded in making out dimly that Grier was up to all his old tricks, cheating and robbing his employer wholesale, and how Emily could sit there and put up with it was beyond Fanny's comprehension. Fanny subsided into a chair and puffed heavily.

"I looked into the shed and the lawn-mower's perfectly good. Didn't you say Grier had asked for a new one?"

"Yes. I ordered it yesterday."

"You shouldn't have done anything of the kind. The old one will last as long as he's here."

Miss Todd trembled. Evidently Fanny was going to waste no time. First herself, then Grier. . . .

"Is it raining, Grier?" she asked him faintly.

"A drop or two, ma'am. We wants a good downpour."

"Yes, it's dreadfully hot."

"Will yer 'ave a drink o' lemonade, ma'am? I made it fresh this morning."

"Oh, thank you. That would be nice."

"It's much too near lunch, dearest Emily," Fanny objected.

"You needn't have any, but I'm certainly going to, please, Grier."

Fanny, Miss Todd saw, was in a dilemma. She was greedy and never missed a chance of eating or drinking, apart from her legitimate meals. Despite her sneers at it the first time she tasted lemonade in the lodge Fanny could not resist Grier's special brew, but it gratified her to prevent Miss Todd from drinking it on every possible opportunity. Now Miss Todd had defied her and was about to drink lemonade. After a struggle Fanny gave way.

"I'll have some too, Grier," she called.

Grier had gone out of the room to fetch the beverage. He came back, carrying it in an old cut-glass jug on a little tray. Miss Todd took up her tumbler and regarded it affectionately.

"I love my own glass with the dragon handle," she murmured. "Isn't it wonderful, Fanny, how it's survived all these years?"

"Very. Didn't you hear me say I'd have lemonade too, Grier?" Fanny spoke tartly. "Bring a glass for me."

"Yes, ma'am."

Grier shambled out. He was absent from the room for so long that Fanny began to fidget and grumble about his delay. Even Miss Todd wondered at it. Grier had only to go to the kitchen to fetch a second vessel.

Eventually he returned with another tumbler of fine old glass. He took the lemonade jug over to the window. Miss Todd watched him fill the glass and hand it to Fanny. Fanny drank a little and complained that it tasted bitter.

"Oh, nonsense, Fanny! Mine's delicious."

"Put sugar in, ma'am," urged Grier.

He took a bowl of sugar out of a chiffonier and offered it clumsily. Fanny added a liberal spoonful to her lemonade and emptied the glass. Miss Todd likewise finished hers. Grier shuffled out of the room with both glasses and the jug.

Miss Todd and Fanny sat in silence. Before long a grinding of wheels on the gravel outside and voices heralded the arrival of the belated taxi. Grier came back to announce that it was waiting and Fanny immediately marched out to scold the driver for his delay. Rising feebly, Miss Todd clung to Grier's arm. "Don't forget," she murmured urgently.

The taxi, old and springless, ground up the drive. The last Miss Todd's blurred gaze saw of Grier was the wizened brown face grinning reassuringly at her from the doorway of the lodge. Everything swam under a kind of haze: the beds of massed rhododendrons, drooping in the heat, Fanny's

face beside her, the green of the cucumbers still clutched in Fanny's fingers. Would Fanny strike before Grier had time to carry out her directions?

Her ears took in but vaguely Fanny's grumbling monologue concerning Grier and the cucumbers. Fanny seemed to think Grier dishonest, disobliging, impertinent, and dearest Emily was culpably blind to his faults and mistakenly foolish in retaining him in her service. Goaded, at last Miss Todd roused herself. If Fanny were going to murder her, at least she would exact her pound of flesh by speaking her mind first.

"That will do, Fanny. It's no business of yours whether I keep on Grier or not. You've succeeded in making me leave him out of my will, and this ought to satisfy you. Only, please remember that if a will can be altered once it can be again."

She saw that her unexpected firmness, the vague hint of changing her dispositions in a way which might reinstate Grier amongst her legatees and not favour Fanny to the extent that the new existing will did had frightened her. Perhaps she had been foolish. Her words might drive Fanny to act swiftly. Well, in a measure, she did not care whether they did. This suspense, these speculations as to how and when the blow would fall were wearing her down. . . .

"Isn't it hot?" Fanny remarked.

"Very. I hate thunderstorms, but in a way I wish we could have one. A good downpour might cool the atmosphere."

"I thought I heard one or two peals a little while ago."

The taxi drew up at the foot of the steps. Fanny plunged down and made her way into the house. Miss Todd heard her calling for Sarah and knew that Fanny would be occupied giving the cook orders about the cucumbers. She paid the taxi-man and directed him to return to the lodge for Grier.

"I want you to take him to Market Batnors. I don't know how long he will be there, but you'd better wait and drive him back. How much? I see. Will that cover everything?"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Good morning."

"Good morning."

The taxi-man reversed his vehicle and drove away, all smiles. Miss Todd had tipped him lavishly for this short drive and even more substantially for the prospective drive to and from Market Batnors. He felt that he'd earned it after the way the fat old bitch in the tight dress had ticked him off for keeping both of 'em waiting. It wasn't his fault. He'd just returned from Cross Baskets and went straight to the Croft gates directly he was told a taxi had been 'phoned for. The poor old lady who'd paid him looked downright ill. He wondered the other had scuttled into the house like that instead of stopping to help her companion. Afraid of being asked to pay her share of the taxi, perhaps. Huh!

Lunch was served in the dining-room which seemed to resemble a furnace. Despite the lowered blinds the room was glaring, torrid. The deep red of the roses on the table, fresh that morning, seemed to be decaying to a sickly purple. The very forks and spoons were sticky, the knife-handles moist. Miss Todd could scarcely eat, but Fanny embarked on cold salmon and cucumber with zest.

"Naturally you aren't hungry, dearest Emily, after sitting for hours in that dreadful stuffy parlour at the lodge and drinking lemonade."

"You drank it too."

"I couldn't be rude and refuse, could I?"

"Refuse what? Grier's lemonade? He didn't offer you any. You asked for it when I said I was having some."

Fanny sighed gently and assumed her martyr-like expression. Of course, it must be said, Emily's tired out and that makes her cross, poor thing. I must be patient.

"I wish you hadn't insisted on walking down to the village and back," Fanny went on. "And you wouldn't use the short-cut either time. I can't understand why you've taken this dislike to the bridge."

"I preferred the high-road."

"But it's much longer and uphill all the way home. I think you were very silly."

"Well, another day you can go by the bridge and I'll do as I please."

Would there be another day?

Fanny cast Miss Todd a look of sad reproach and helped herself to more salmon.

Lunch concluded, both old ladies retired upstairs. Miss Todd, as she had done on the previous night, locked her bedroom door. She lay down, but resolved not to fall asleep in case Grier rang up from Market Batnors. If Elisabeth took the message she might have the wits not to mention it to Fanny. The room was cool, cooler than the dining-room, and before long Miss Todd's eyelids closed. She slept and dreamed—dreamed disagreeably that Fanny had locked her into the library and she was hammering on the door. Bang, bang, bang. Could her slender, wrinkled fists produce such a noise? With a jerk Miss Todd woke and sat up, but the knocking persisted.

"Are you awake, ma'am?" Elisabeth's voice asked.

"Yes. Is that you, Elisabeth? Come in."

"I can't, ma'am. The door's locked."

Miss Todd groaned, crawled to her feet, crossed the floor rather shakily, and turned back the key. Elisabeth addressed her in the voice of a conspirator.

"There's been a telephone message for you, ma'am. Mr. Palliser rang up to say the business you'd sent Grier about has been settled quite satisfactorily."

"Oh, thank you, Elisabeth. Yes, it—it was just something I wanted Grier to do and he was to ring up from Mr. Palliser's office." Miss Todd's voice shook. Her heart was singing. As far as Grier was concerned Fanny had overreached herself. If only she did not get to hear of it in some underhand way and spoil Miss Todd's little scheme!

"Does Miss Anderson know that Mr. Palliser rang up?" she inquired apprehensively.

"No, ma'am. She's laying down. She's not well," Elisabeth added indifferently.

"Not well?"

"No, ma'am. She rang her bell 'bout half an hour ago and said she felt very queer."

"Queer? In what way? Oh, dear! Why didn't you tell me?"

"There was no need to worry you, ma'am. It's just the hot weather, and she ate cucumber at lunch and it never agrees with her."

"I know, but—— I think I'd better go and see if she wants anything. It's so unlike her to be poorly."

Miss Todd walked down the corridor and tapped at Fanny's door. A muffled voice asked who was there.

"It's only Emily, dear. Elisabeth said you were not feeling very well. I'm sorry. May I come in?"

A groan answered her.

The groan frightened Miss Todd. It sounded as though Fanny really must be suffering great pain. She opened the door. . . .

"Elisabeth, are you there? Sarah!"

"Yes, ma'am?" Elisabeth appeared in reply to Miss Todd's agitated summons. Sarah's face peered inquisitively over Elisabeth's shoulder.

"Miss Anderson's dreadfully ill. Will you ring up Dr. Meredith, please, and ask him to come as soon as he possibly can?"

"Yes, ma'am; but don't you worry. It's just the 'eat," explained Sarah.

"*And* cucumber," supplied Elisabeth darkly.

Miss Todd felt too frightened by Fanny's symptoms to argue that surely more than undue indulgence in cucumber on a hot day must have caused them.

After Dr. Karslake's death neither she nor Fanny had required to call in his successor. Fanny had never known a day's illness since the hour of her arrival at the Croft. Miss Todd, from sheer terror before the prospect of being on a bed of sickness with Fanny in attendance, had managed to keep on her feet however ailing she felt. Thus it was a stranger in a professional sense whom she greeted nervously now.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Meredith. How very good of you to come so promptly!"

"Good afternoon, Miss Todd. Not at all. What is wrong?"

"It's Miss Anderson—my friend."

"I passed you both in the village this morning."

"I know. She seemed perfectly well then, but since lunch she's been taken ill."

"In what way?"

"Well"—Miss Todd blushed—"she's dreadfully sick and—and other things. I was rather frightened—Fanny's so strong as a rule—and I thought I'd better get you to come."

"Very wise of you. It sounds like some little digestive upset. This hot weather, you know. Might I see her?"

"Certainly. I'll take you up."

Miss Todd waited with considerable agitation until Dr. Meredith reappeared. Was it, she faltered, anything serious?

"H'm. Well. It's difficult to say at this stage exactly what's amiss. Has she been eating anything liable to disagree with her?"

"Just our ordinary meals. She had some cucumber with the salmon at lunch and Elisabeth—the housemaid—thought it might be that."

"Exactly."

"Will she be better soon?"

"Oh, it may take a day or two. Is there anybody to look after her?"

"Only myself. I'm afraid the maids would think it wasn't their work, and—and she doesn't get on very well with either."

"I see. It's out of the question for you, of course. Better let me send in a nurse."

"A nurse? Oh, is she as ill as all that?"

"I hope the attack may turn out to be something quite simple, but Miss Anderson is not a young woman. She will need care. A trained nurse is essential. I couldn't allow you to knock yourself up."

"But Fanny—Miss Anderson—won't like having a nurse. She always arranges everything, and—and——"

"She'll have to be content to let other people manage without her for a bit."

Miss Todd, helpless, flustered, allowed Dr. Meredith to interview Elisabeth, secure her promise that the nurse's comfort should be arranged for, and then crept upstairs to Fanny. All her fears of Fanny's intentions, her terror of her, her imminent extinction at Fanny's hands had vanished. Fanny was ill, suffering, prostrate. She must be soothed, reassured, cared for. In bed, shattered, her hair in a scanty confusion, her teeth out, Fanny looked very old, very fat, rather pathetic. Miss Todd kissed her gently.

"Dearest Fanny, you mustn't worry. Dr. Meredith says it's just something you've eaten and it's upset you. He's sending in a nurse because I want you to have the best care, and I shouldn't be very much use to look after you. I'm sure you'll be more comfortable with a trained nurse."

"I shan't pay for her," Fanny croaked hoarsely.

"No, of course not. That's my privilege."

"The maids won't wait on her. Servants hate a nurse."

"Elisabeth's been quite nice about it. Don't worry. And you forget, Fanny, that I'm accustomed to nurses and their ways. We had two in the house for months with Papa."

"That was years ago. Servants were different then. And I forgot to tell Sarah about the sweetbreads for dinner."

"Please, dear, don't worry over things like that. I know we'll be all at sea without you, but we'll manage. Only get well."

Miss Todd kissed Fanny again. Fanny looked slightly surprised, but her eyes did not soften.

The nurse arrived very soon. She was with Fanny all the evening, all the night, and at breakfast announced that she must have a colleague to relieve her. A second nurse came. Life narrowed down to meals for the nurses, orders from the nurses, complaints from the nurses, bulletins from the nurses as to Fanny's progress. Fanny was seriously ill. The continual sickness and other distressing symptoms persisted. Dr. Meredith pronounced her to be suffering from acute gastritis. It might be caused, he opined, by a combination of circumstances such as the extremely hot weather, the food, the indigestible nature of the latter.

"But I ate just the same things and I'm perfectly well," objected Miss Todd.

"You ate less, probably, and cucumber may not have the same effect upon you."

"I forget whether I had any. I know I could only eat a very little salmon."

"Then most likely the cucumber was the original cause of this illness in Miss Anderson's case."

Miss Todd looked away from Dr. Meredith, twisted her hands, and asked a question.

"Will she——? Is she——? Won't she get well?"

"I don't wish to conceal from you, Miss Todd, that Miss Anderson's

condition is grave. At her age—— I think you should at all events prepare yourself for an unfavourable termination.”

“Oh! Oh, *Fanny!*”

“I know that you are great friends. This must be a shock to you.”

“We’ve lived together for thirty years.”

“Has Miss Anderson no relatives?”

“I never heard of any. Oh, Dr. Meredith, can nothing be done? A—a second opinion? A consultation?”

“By all means, if you wish.”

“Oh, please. I want her to have every chance. Poor, poor *Fanny!*”

Miss Todd felt terrified by the prospect of losing *Fanny*. It was so hard on *Fanny* too, such an unkind stroke of Fate, that just when she had made sure of Miss Todd’s money and had doubtless laid all her plans for Miss Todd to go first, *Fanny* should die instead.

Life without *Fanny* seemed too extraordinary, too impossible to grasp. Miss Todd would be able to decide things for herself, to act as she pleased, to go in and out as she chose. Her existence would no longer be threatened. She could not realize what *Fanny*’s death would bring her in the way of freedom. Somehow, she told herself, she no longer wanted to be free. *Fanny* had riveted her chains so successfully and strongly for so many years that Miss Todd felt incapable of taking a step alone.

The specialist saw *Fanny*. He held out no hope. Her age, her stoutness were against her. In a way it was surprising that she had survived this illness so long as three days. Three days! Was it, Miss Todd asked herself incredulously, only four days since she had signed her new will in *Fanny*’s favour, and three since she had gone to the village, quaking by *Fanny*’s side, drunk lemonade with *Fanny* at the lodge, and they lunched together for the last time? Three days!

It was the evening of the third day. *Fanny* was, in the nurses’ professional phrase, very low. The sickness and other ungenteel symptoms, including acute thirst and a curious tingling which she complained of in her hands and feet, had been brought under control, but she was lying there, the yellow skin stretched over her face, her cheeks fallen in, her mouth ajar. Miss Todd sat beside her, frightened, watchful. Would *Fanny* speak to her, make some mention of their friendship, utter a syllable of regret at leaving Miss Todd or of affection for her ere she drifted out on the dark tide? She wondered whether *Fanny* knew that she was dying. . . .

“*Emily?*”

“Yes, dearest *Fanny?*”

“I feel so tired.”

“Of course you do, dear.”

Fanny’s hands, amazingly thinner even in a few days, plucked restlessly at the eiderdown.

“*Emily?*”

“What is it, *Fanny?* I’m here.”

“Am I going to get better?”

Miss Todd answered evasively: “Dr. Meredith thinks you very ill.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“No, dear. Would you like to see Mr. Winchester?”

“He couldn’t do any good.”

Sunday after Sunday she and *Fanny* had gone to church. They had sat

side by side in the high, old-fashioned pew where Miss Todd had sat as a small girl between her parents, then with Papa, and finally alone—until the advent of Fanny. Did what Fanny and she repeated, sang, avowed belief in, promised, and listened to Sunday after Sunday bring her any comfort, any stability, any reassurance now? Old people, Miss Todd mused wearily, were necessarily supposed to be wise, certain, calm, courageous, experienced, but in reality they were none of these things. At bottom they felt like children still, little frightened children, afraid of life, afraid of death. She was frightened. . . .

"It isn't fair," Fanny muttered.

"What's not fair, Fanny dear? Is it anything I could put right?"

"No. It's not fair that I should die first. I always thought you would go before me."

Miss Todd said gently: "I know you did."

"It was only right I should have the money. You've had it all these years. I'd"—Fanny gulped pitifully—"counted on it, Emily."

"Of course, dear."

"I'd like to have been Miss Anderson of the Croft, not just Miss Todd's companion. That's all everybody here—the servants, the villagers, any of your friends—have thought me. Miss Todd's paid companion."

Fanny's sunken eyes gleamed. Her exhausted voice sounded weakly bitter.

"You've been rich all your life. You don't know what it's like to be poor, to have to take favours."

"They weren't favours, Fanny, anything I gave you. And all Little Batnors knows we are friends—two friends living together."

"They know I'm only your companion, doing the housekeeping."

Fanny seemed, in some obscure way, to blame Miss Todd for their thirty years' relationship.

"I'm very sorry, Fanny."

"Even Dr. Meredith— Did you tell him I was your companion?"

"Dearest Fanny, Dr. Meredith knows that you're my friend."

"I ought to have lived a long, long time," Fanny mumbled. "I'm so cold."

"Shall I call nurse?"

"No. I don't want her. I don't want you, Emily. Do go away."

"Oh, Fanny, mayn't I stay?"

"No. I'm dying, and I ought to be allowed to die alone if I choose."

Fanny turned her head aside. The pettish, feeble movement was her last gesture, her last farewell to the woman whom she had bullied, exploited, robbed, and by whose death she had planned to benefit. It was a final, expiring vindication of the fact that Fanny was always right.

Miss Todd crept away. On the threshold of the room she whispered pitifully: "Good-bye, Fanny," but Fanny made no reply. The nurse came in as Miss Todd went out.

At ten o'clock that evening Fanny Anderson died. A thrush was pouring his heart out against a background of glowing sunset, and Miss Todd sat in the drawing-room, wondering whether she dared ring and ask for a cup of tea. Fanny had always set her face against odd cups of tea. Miss Todd could not realize that Fanny was dead and never again in this world would be able to object to anything Miss Todd wanted to do.

Her death shocked and surprised Little Batnors, which had apparently shared Fanny's own belief in her certainty of surviving Miss Todd. The last morning the two had been together in the village others besides Mrs. Meredith had noticed how ill Miss Todd looked and how Miss Anderson had appeared to be enjoying her usual robust health. It was very sad, very unfortunate. What would poor Miss Todd do without her? Poor Miss Todd subsided into bed and tried to convince herself that she had a perfect right to remain there as long as she chose. It was no use. Every moment she thought she heard Fanny's voice summoning her, or Fanny's footstep outside coming to suggest that she was quite well and would be better up. How incredible, impossible, grotesque it seemed that she, who so recently had known herself doomed, should still live—and Fanny was dead!

The nurses left on the morning after Fanny's death. Miss Todd felt that she was carrying out Fanny's wishes in parting with them directly their services were no longer required, but Fanny would most certainly not have approved of the farewell present of money bestowed by Miss Todd on both. They deserved it, she argued. It had been a trying case. Dr. Meredith was very kind. It was he who arranged for Mr. Palliser to come and see Miss Todd. There were—ahem!—certain arrangements to be made. Miss Todd received Mr. Palliser in her bedroom, wearing her dressing-gown, both of which actions Fanny would definitely have objected to. That she did not come in and object, that she never would come in and no longer had the power to object to anything Miss Todd said, did, or wore was unrealizable. At intervals during the interview Miss Todd started nervously and broke off what she was saying in order to listen. Surely she heard Fanny outside the door?

"This is very sudden, Miss Todd," Mr. Palliser observed.

"Yes, indeed it is, Mr. Palliser."

"When I witnessed your new will, drawn up in favour of Miss Anderson—dear! dear! only five days ago—one would hardly have anticipated such a totally unexpected—er—change of circumstance."

(Emphatically Fanny had not anticipated it.)

"May I ask whether you have any wishes with regard to the funeral, or did Miss Anderson leave some directions?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. She never mentioned it to me. You see"—Miss Todd mustered a sickly smile—"she supposed—that is, we both did—that I would go first."

"Well, you haven't." Mr. Palliser's blunt words rather scandalized Miss Todd.

"No."

"Has Miss Anderson any relations you could communicate with?"

"I always understood that she had none."

"Then the funeral had better take place from here to the cemetery at Market Batnors. Shall we say on Friday afternoon? This is Tuesday."

"Thank you." How extraordinary it was not to consult Fanny, to ascertain Fanny's wishes, to avoid Fanny's disapproval!

"You would like the service in the church here, I presume? Dr. Meredith tells me he has rung up your rector."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Winchester kindly called as soon as he heard."

"Then I suggest that you and he decide what hymns and so on you wish."

I will communicate with the undertaker, and that will spare you a certain amount of—ah—unpleasant arrangements.”

“It’s very good of you. I feel so helpless. Fanny always saw to everything, and when Papa died I had Mr. Massey.”

“Yes, of course. Well, try to rest and—er—take care of yourself, my dear Miss Todd. Don’t hesitate to ring up the office if I can assist you in any way.”

“Thank you very much.”

“You must not grieve too greatly. Miss Anderson was an old lady and she has been spared a long illness or increasing disability in any form. When I was here on Thursday I thought her distressingly deaf.”

How angry Fanny would have been to hear this! From sheer force of habit Miss Todd glanced round apprehensively.

“Your hearing is remarkably good.” Mr. Palliser smiled. “A great blessing.”

“Yes. I wish my sight were better, though. I need glasses for everything, and cannot read nearly as much as I used to. Fanny had wonderful sight. She—she was saying so only on Wednesday.”

Wednesday! Was it six days ago that Fanny had forced Miss Todd into ringing up Mr. Palliser the following morning and making arrangements to draw up a new will? She would never benefit by it now. Fanny was dead.

Fanny was dead, and on Friday afternoon she left the Croft for the last time. It was a beautiful day, with birds singing and the close, airless heat of the previous week replaced by brilliant sunshine and clear skies of cloud-draped blue. Miss Todd was too agitated to be able to attend even the service in the little church. She lay in bed and listened to the tramp of footsteps, the slow, heavy, shuffling noises as they carried Fanny past her door, and the sounds which indicated that Fanny’s coffin was being manœuvred into the waiting hearse. Then the quiet fell again and Miss Todd realized that she might as well get up. Probably only Mr. Palliser and Mr. Winchester would return from the cemetery and come to the house to assure her that all had gone smoothly. It didn’t matter whether it had. Fanny was in no position to object to or disapprove of Miss Todd’s arrangements for laying her to rest.

Miss Todd put a cautious foot out of bed, following it with her whole person. She stood on the solid carpet (Fanny would not hear of polished boards and Persian rugs in any of the bedrooms) and reached for her dressing-gown. It was Fanny who insisted, in view of Miss Todd’s slight tendency to bronchitis, on her wearing a Jaeger dressing-gown, summer and winter, whereas Miss Todd’s yearnings were for her discarded quilted silk. She would buy a new dressing-gown, a pink one, without delay. As a tribute to convention and Fanny’s memory she had procured suitable mourning to be worn downstairs, but a dressing-gown was one’s own private concern, a bedroom mystery and relaxation, and Miss Todd determined not to compromise with mauve or grey. Pink she craved and pink she meant to have. A pink dressing-gown would be the symbol of her victory over Fanny’s dominion, a flag of defiance, so to speak, and—O delightful thought!—Fanny could not say a word in contempt or objection.

Directly she was dressed Miss Todd pattered to the window and drew up the blinds. She was not outraging the proprieties or slighting Fanny’s memory. The blinds ought to be raised in any case now that the funeral

had left the house. Even whilst they were down the sunshine was very brilliant. Why should she, not really ill, lie in bed in the dark just because Fanny Anderson was being buried? Rebellion raised his head cautiously. Miss Todd had spent thirty years in obliging Fanny, considering Fanny, obeying Fanny, conciliating Fanny, subsidizing Fanny, and she really could not see what good it could do Fanny or herself to keep the blinds down or remain in bed. She would go downstairs this very minute, and if Fanny were cross with her——

With a renewed shock Miss Todd remembered that Fanny was dead—dead and buried—and however much she might disapprove, wherever she happened to be, would have no visible means of indicating the same.

Her hands shook as she adjusted the high black silk collar at her throat. Whilst others saw her shorn, bewildered, lost without Fanny, broken-hearted at the abrupt loss of Fanny, Miss Todd could scarcely realize her good fortune. It seemed so—so indecent to be glad because Fanny was dead, yet she was glad. Death had been so convenient and dignified. Death had severed her and Fanny, released her from Fanny, all in the most decorous, conventional way. Even Fanny could not call the manner of their parting Miss Todd's fault, or suggest that she might have acted differently. Miss Todd had not been offered any choice. She would not have been able to keep Fanny had she wanted to. The shameful thing was that she did not want to, had not wanted to, and only regretted the delay and tardiness of Death's appearance. Those last terrible days before Fanny's illness she had expected death at Fanny's hands. Lo! Death proved a benefactor in another guise. He had come for Fanny, not for Miss Todd.

The survivor put in her last hairpin (Fanny always suppressed any timid suggestion of Miss Todd's shingling her still abundant but unmanageable grey hair) and went downstairs. The house felt very quiet. Elisabeth had pulled up all the blinds. Strong sunlight streamed in. Fanny would be cross and complain that it faded the carpets. No, she couldn't complain about anything any more. She was dead and buried. . . .

"Would you like tea now, ma'am?" Elisabeth had appeared as Miss Todd stood glancing over the letters and cards piled on the hall table.

"Thank you, Elisabeth, I think I should." Miss Todd looked gratefully at the maid. She hoped that she and Sarah would stay. Both liked her. It was only Fanny who——

"I'll bring it up. Oh, and please, ma'am, there's someone to see you, a—a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes, ma'am. Leastways not a lady." Elisabeth sniffed.

"What does she want?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I think it's about Miss Anderson's death."

"Had I better see her?"

"Well, that's for you to decide, ma'am. If I was you I'd let her wait and have your tea first."

"Where is she?"

"I put her in the library, ma'am."

Miss Todd was beginning to hate the library. It had witnessed so many of Fanny's victories and Miss Todd's defeats at Fanny's hands. She did not want to go into it now and perhaps have to talk about Fanny with an unknown woman.

"I'd rather you brought tea into the drawing-room, Elisabeth." She spoke nervously. "I'll just have a cup and then see her. I wonder why she's come. Did she give any name?"

"No, ma'am."

The tea was hot and comforting. Sarah had provided the little currant scones Miss Todd secretly loved, but which Fanny had pronounced indigestible for her and ordered to be banished from the afternoon meal. Now, if she wished, Miss Todd could have currant scones at tea every day of her life.

She ate three and drank two cups of tea. Then she rang for Elisabeth to take away the tray and went slowly into the library.

The room, even on a bright day, bore a sombre aspect. Miss Todd had complained to Mr. Palliser of her failing sight, and as she walked forward to greet a figure standing up from one of the big leather arm-chairs she wondered whether her eyes could be playing her tricks. Had the last few days been a dream and Fanny was not dead? The figure standing there was very like Fanny—less stout, younger, but still Fanny—Fanny run to seed, a commoner, cheaper replica of Fanny. Miss Todd gasped.

"Good afternoon," the stranger remarked affably. Her voice, too, was a less refined edition of Fanny's.

"Good afternoon. My maid said you wished to see me. I'm sorry to have kept you sitting here."

"That's all right. She told me you was having a lay-down and I said I'd wait."

Miss Todd felt nonplussed. Who was this person? For the first time she caught herself wishing that Fanny might come in. Fanny was so clear-headed, so quick in any difficult situation. She would have found out the woman's business, dispatched it, and sent her away in less time than it took Miss Todd to totter to a chair and sit down.

The stranger resumed her former seat uninvited.

"Can I do anything for you?" Miss Todd inquired civilly. This was all rather awkward. She hoped that Mr. Palliser would return soon from the funeral. He might be able to ascertain who the woman was, what she wanted, and why she had come to the Croft on the very afternoon of Fanny's burial. Elisabeth said it was to do with Fanny. . . .

"Well, that depends. I don't know, of course, what Fanny may have fixed up."

"Miss Anderson?"

"That's right. I only saw her death in the paper yesterday and I came at once. I was too late for the funeral—not that Fanny'd have cared for me turning up at it—so I just went on here instead."

Miss Todd felt that she could hardly ask the stranger why she had done this. She was dressed in cheap mourning, obviously not bought for the occasion, but she did not look or speak as though Fanny's death had been in any sense a grief or a bereavement. Her manner, like her voice, was a dim copy of Fanny's when Fanny became hectoring or aggressive. Unconsciously Miss Todd rebelled against it. She might have been bullied by Fanny yet she was certainly not going to be bullied by an unknown woman who resembled her outwardly, but had not stated any reason for her intrusion.

"I'm afraid I don't know your name," she began stiffly.

"Roper—Charlotte Roper."

Roper. Roper. Why should the name ring a bell in the dim recesses of Miss Todd's memory?

"Miss Roper?" she asked doubtfully. The woman did not look married, and as she wore cheap black suede gloves covering her large hands Miss Todd was unable to see whether she had a wedding-ring.

"That's right."

"But who—— Forgive me, but I don't know——"

"Who I am?" The woman laughed and Miss Todd shuddered. The sound was Fanny's very laugh. "I'll tell you in a word. I'm Fanny Anderson's cousin."

Her cousin! Fanny's cousin! Miss Todd's brain reeled.

"Fanny never said—— I always thought—that is, I understood—she had no relations."

"Of course that's what she told you. Oh, Fanny was a fly one."

Miss Todd said with dignity: "She is dead."

"That's right. It's what's brought me to-day. If she's dead she may have left a will. Her own flesh and blood ought to get what she had. That's only fair, ain't it?"

Fanny was dead. Fanny was lying in the grave in Market Batnors cemetery where her coffin had been deposited only that afternoon, but Fanny seemed to be alive, storming in a shrill, unmodulated, uneducated voice at Miss Todd. She put a hand to her forehead.

"I don't understand. Are you Fanny's *cousin*?"

"That's right. My father and her mother were brother and sister."

"I—I didn't know. Fanny never said a word——"

"Catch her! Didn't want you to know that her aunt was married to a man as kept an inn, and her sister—my mother—helped him after his wife died. Fanny was stopping there, the time you came, and she got hold of you good and proper, right and tight, and never let you go. Oh, she was clever, was Fanny."

"A man who kept an inn? Fanny's uncle by marriage! Not Mr. Bowles? The Woolpack?"

"That's right."

"But Mr. Bowles married Timmins—my maid."

"Did Fanny tell you that?"

"Yes. At least, I always understood Timmins was married. She gave me notice and left and I thought—I hoped she was married."

"Fanny made you swallow that," Charlotte Roper grinned. "She saw it was well worth her while getting rid of Timmins and taking her place. She fooled her nicely too. Thanks to Fanny, Timmins believed my uncle was going to make her Mrs. B. number two, but she very soon found out, after she'd thrown up her soft job with you, that he wasn't having any."

The woman's crude vulgarity made Miss Todd wince. She saw it all now: Fanny's flatteries, her hints to Timmins that Mr. Bowles had matrimonial intentions, her goading of the poor creature to give up her situation, Fanny's deft insinuation of herself into Miss Todd's good graces when bereft of Timmins. What had become of Timmins? Faintly she inquired whether Miss Roper knew.

"Oh, she got a job in Derriford and then another, but after Mother and me moved to London (Mother didn't fancy the inn and Uncle Charlie

expected her to work like a nigger, the way he did Aunt Agnes, his wife) I lost sight of her. I expect she's dead long ago."

"Why didn't she write to me? If she'd only told me the truth I'd gladly have had her back."

Charlotte Roper looked at the floor.

"I think she tried to, only Fanny was up to her tricks. She kept Timmins from coming to see you, when you were ill, and I know she told her you'd said you didn't want to have anything more to do with her after she'd been so ungrateful."

Miss Todd's tears began to fall silently. How much Fanny had robbed her of! It was not only Timmins, but Timmins had been led by Fanny to believe that Miss Todd was incensed with her, wishful never to see or hear from her, had cast her faithful maid off, and Timmins, most likely dead now, had been ashamed to come to Little Batnors, a discarded virgin, or communicate with any of her friends. Sybil Karslake's letter, if ever it reached Timmins, had remained unanswered. How cruel! How cruel!

"And Fanny?" Miss Todd faltered. "I never knew she was—was related to the people at the Woolpack. Her father was a clergyman."

"Oh, was he? Another of Fanny's fairy-tales, I suppose?"

"I think she told me he was, but I can't be quite certain. I may have misunderstood, especially as she seems to have deceived me in other ways, but I certainly was under the impression that he had been connected with Derriford cathedral."

"So he was." Charlotte Roper chuckled. "Second verger."

"A—a verger?"

"For a time. He got the sack from the cathedral for drinking and started a little shop in Lower Derriford, newspapers and tobacco. It didn't pay, so when he died Fanny had little or nothing. She tried different jobs, companion to old ladies, always hoping one of them would leave her a legacy. I bet she tried that on with you, eh?"

"It doesn't matter." Miss Todd's expiring loyalty to Fanny dictated her next words. "I knew that she had been a companion before she came to live with me."

"Ever tell you why she lost her best job?"

"Oh, yes. The old lady's nephew wanted to marry her, so she left."

"And you swallowed that? Well, really! She did her best to catch him, and Mrs. Bailey got rid of her in double-quick time when she spotted her little game. She needn't have worried. Fanny hadn't a dog's chance of the chap."

Miss Todd put a hand to her throbbing brow.

"Please don't tell me any more. It's terrible. *Fanny!* I—I can't believe it."

The woman Charlotte Roper looked at her with a rough compassion. "Diddled you properly, I bet. If she's been managing your affairs (I had a glass of beer at the local pub and they were talking about you and her in the bar and she seems to have refused to let you call your soul your own, you poor old silly) then she'll have made a nice purse for herself."

"No! No! I paid her a salary, but she wouldn't—"

"Wouldn't she? She cooked your account at the Woolpack, made it out for three times as much as the ordinary charges, and then pretended to get it altered and pocketed the difference. Eh? Doesn't that show?"

"I—gave it to her."

"More fool you! Well, anyway, she'll have nice pickings, savings as well as what she robbed you of, and why shouldn't her relations get it? We're her nearest, my brother and me. He was too much of a coward to come to-day, but I said I'd go and see how things were. Has she left a will?"

"I don't know. I haven't the faintest idea."

"Well, I'll put up at a pub in Market Batnors and go and see a solicitor. He'll advise me."

"Yes," Miss Todd agreed inaudibly.

"Mind you, I'm not going to worry you." Charlotte Roper patted Miss Todd's shoulder. "I'd say you'd had enough of it. We all lost track of her ever since she came here with you, and hadn't a notion she'd been with you ever since until Cyril—that's my brother—spotted the announcement in *The Times*. Thirty years of Fanny! Gawd!"

Thirty years. . . . Thirty years. . . .

They were both silent. Charlotte Roper's bold eyes roved round the room.

"Well-off, ain't you? I bet Fanny reckoned on outliving you and getting you to leave her everything? Eh? Pity she missed it, but she was a good age—older than you, I'd say."

"I'm seventy-eight."

"Fancy! Fanny was eighty. I'm not that yet, you know. I was just a schoolgirl when she fell in with you. What took her off?"

"Gastritis. She was only ill a few days."

"I see. Well, I'd better be toddling. I'm sorry if I've bothered you the day of the funeral and everything, but what I says is, if you don't look out for yourself in this world nobody else is likely to do it for you."

"No."

"It needn't come out—about Fanny, I mean."

"Thank you."

"Cheerio. I'll find my own way. And buck up. You'll be a sight happier without Fanny bossing you."

"Won't you—won't you have some tea? I dare say the maids wouldn't mind getting it."

Charlotte Roper gave her a curious look.

"Scared to give an order without Fanny's permission? Thank your stars you needn't wait for that any more. 'Bye."

Charlotte Roper had gone. Miss Todd stood staring down at the copy of *The Times* lying on the library table. She spelled out the first of the obituaries with her dim old eyes.

ANDERSON.—At the Croft, Little Batnors, Loamshire, on the 18th inst., after a brief illness, FRANCES CAROLINE (FANNY) ANDERSON, for thirty years the beloved friend and companion of Emily Todd. Service in All Saints' Church, Little Batnors, at 2.15 on Friday, 22nd inst., and afterwards at Market Batnors Cemetery.

It was very hot. Scarcely realizing what she did Miss Todd put on her broad-brimmed mushroom hat, now adorned with a band of black ribbon, and went out. Fanny would say that it would be disrespectful to her memory to roam about the gardens on the day of her funeral, but Miss Todd could

not stay indoors. As yet her mind failed to grasp fully everything the woman Charlotte Roper had told her, but she saw vaguely that throughout Fanny had lied and cheated and bamboozled her. What a fool she had been, and how often Fanny must have laughed in her sleeve! It was too late now. Fanny, locust-like, had eaten thirty years of Miss Todd's life. There was no remedy, nothing to bring again those lost years. . . .

Miss Todd loitered about in the bitterness of her soul, scarcely heeding the delicious perfume of the roses, all the while casting apprehensive glances over her shoulder in case Fanny suddenly materialized and ordered her back to bed. Eventually her desultory wanderings brought her to the little lodge. Grier was digging in the garden behind. When he saw his mistress he straightened his hooped back and saluted her respectfully. Miss Todd thought miserably of the last time she had spoken to Grier, of that talk with him in the parlour when she had been half-distraught with fear of Fanny. And now Fanny was dead.

"Good afternoon, Grier. What a beautiful day!"

"Ay, 'tis, ma'am. Poor Miss Anderson's got a fine one for her buryin'."

"Yes. I suppose the car with Mr. Palliser will be back any minute. Hadn't you better open the gate?"

"Time enough, ma'am, time enough." Grier chuckled. "Miss Anderson ain't 'ere no more to tell me to 'urry. Oh, a great one she was for keepin' other people up to their dooties. And a mighty sudden call she 'ad, too. Last Friday she come along with you and made 'erself unpleasant about them cucumbers, and she wor took ill that same night and dead three days after, and now she's a-buried all safe. He! he!"

"What do you mean?" Miss Todd asked sharply.

"Nothin', ma'am. Only she won't be a-pokin' and a-pryin' and a-bossin' no more. Yer'll be able to call yer soul yer own for a change, and other folks, too."

"That will do, Grier." Miss Todd strove for dignity. "Your garden looks nice—not a weed."

"Ay. Oh, the new lawn-mower's come, ma'am, the one as Miss Anderson said I wasn't needin'."

"I'm very glad. May I see it? I hope it's what you like?"

"Ay, 'tis that, thankin' you, ma'am. Come in. It's 'ere in the shed."

Grier unfastened the little gate and escorted Miss Todd through the small plot of garden towards a weather-warped shed. Inside, it was very dark. Cobwebs shadowed the one tiny window. Amid a confusion of gardening implements, coils of string, various boxes, barrels, cases, and cans she peered vainly for the new lawn-mower.

"I don't see it, Grier. Of course I'm getting very blind and I haven't on my glasses."

"There, ma'am, just be'ind yer."

"Oh, yes. It looks nice and not too heavy for you."

Having duly admired the lawn-mower Miss Todd lingered. She felt reluctant to return to the empty house, and Grier was always companionable. Idly she fingered objects from a medley of articles on a shelf: a can of oil, packets of flower-seeds, a tray of bulbs, a tin. . . .

"Weed-killer? Oh, isn't that dangerous, Grier?"

"Some say 'tis. I takes care. Put it down, please, ma'am."

Something in Grier's tone made Miss Todd glance at him sharply. He

was grinning, and she began to feel sick and faint. The musty shed swayed round her.

"No, no," she whispered frantically.

"Come out o' this close place, ma'am," Grier urged roughly.

"I—I—— But, Grier, *I drank it too.*"

"Drank wot, ma'am?"

"The lemonade. Last Friday. Fanny and I——"

She stood staring at Grier, her hands clutched to her mouth.

"Yer always does, ma'am."

"But—but——"

She saw the little parlour, herself shattered, agitated, distraught, pouring out her terrors to Grier, her mortal dread of Fanny, and then Fanny returning, scolding Grier, ordering him about, hinting at her coming authority, and his carrying in the lemonade Miss Todd had said she would like. Fanny had asked for some. Miss Todd remembered Grier's bent figure going out and hobbling back with a glass for Fanny. He had poured the lemonade into it himself. Fanny complained of the bitter taste. . . .

"No, no, no!" Miss Todd panted.

Grier took her arm and steered her deftly out of the shed. There was an old bench in the middle of long beds of catmint. Miss Todd sank down on this. The sun was very hot. Perhaps the stuffy shed with its smell of tobacco and oil had made her feel ill. She must have imagined that Grier——

"Oh, Grier, you didn't—— You couldn't have——" she gasped.

He came and stood over her, a wizened gnome in whose hands had lain for a few brief minutes the power to take life and bestow death.

"And supposin' I did?" He spoke gruffly. "Was I goin' to 'ave 'er a-killin' you? She'd 'a done it with sheer fright if nothin' else. I'm only sorry I waited as long as I did, Miss Emily."

Miss Todd sat on the bench in the sunshine. A tiny ladybird was crawling along a strip of the wood. Her eyes followed it without realizing what it was. Grier, her mind cried, Grier—and Fanny.

He nodded and moved away from her.

"Don't yer fret, ma'am. It's all right. Oh, there's the funeral comin' back. Only one car. That'll be the Reverend Winchester and Mr. Palliser. I'll just open the gate, and you nip up to the 'ouse by the other path. And don't 'urry. There ain't no Miss Anderson now to be chivvyin' yer or a-scoldin' yer for bein' out."



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